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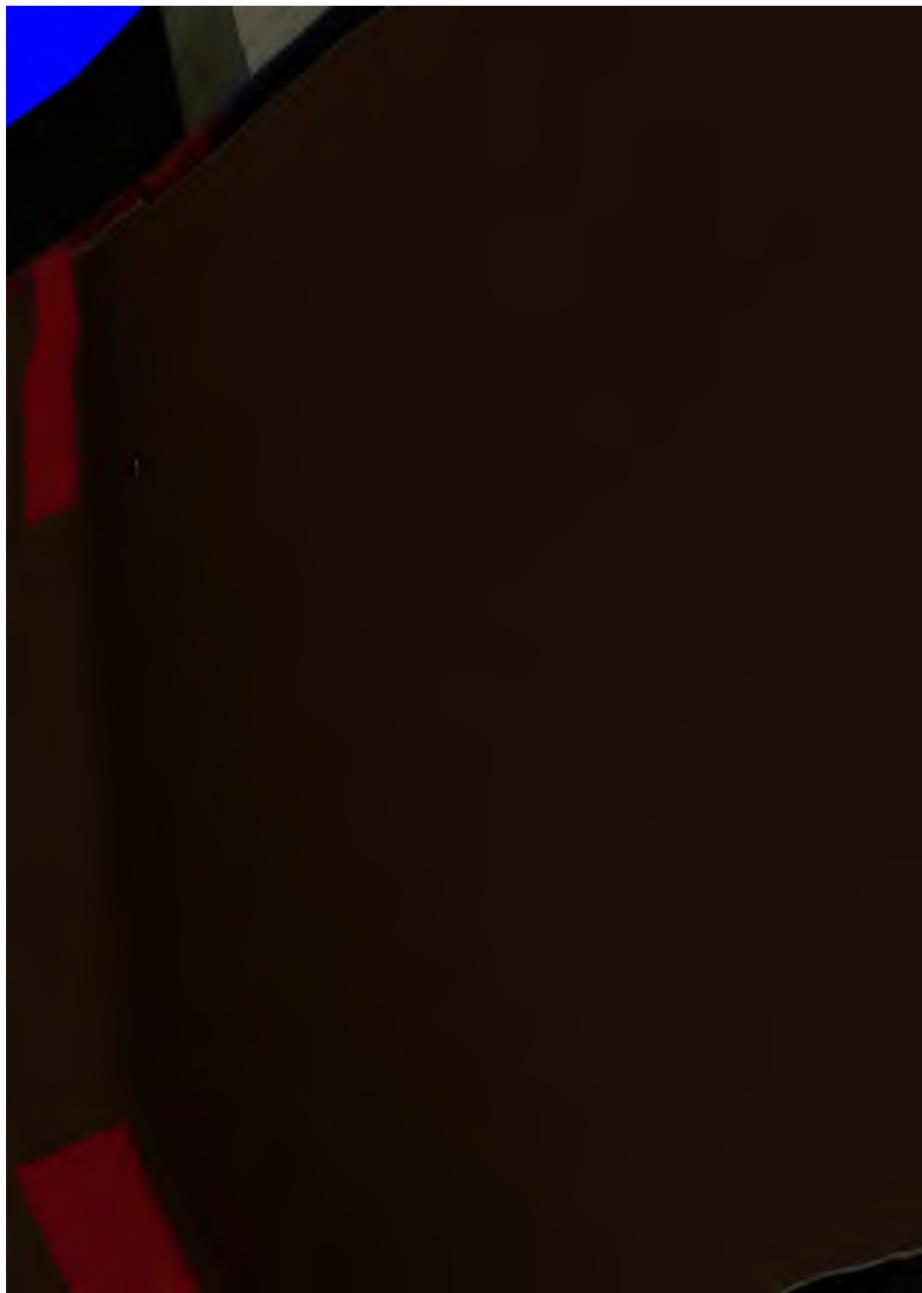
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THE RECOLLECTIONS OF
ALTHEA ALLINGHAM

1785—1842

BY
(Martin.)
EMMA MARSHALL,
AUTHOR OF "MRS. MAINWARING'S JOURNAL," "DAYSPRING," ETC.

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IN FOUR REIGNS.

BOOK I.

“Now good angels
Fly o'er thy royal head, and shade thy person
Under their blessed wings.”

CHAPTER I.

WHEN GEORGE THE THIRD WAS KING.

THERE was very little to break the monotony of our lives, in the old house at Abbotsholme.

We—that is, my twin sisters Judith and Primrose, and myself—passed from our babyhood to childhood, and from our childhood to girlhood, without anything particularly to mark the flight of time. We had childish diseases in regular course, from which we recovered at the appointed time under the care of Pring, our nurse, and Mr. Vidal, the Abbotsholme apothecary.

We had no brothers—a great loss, for which nothing ever quite compensated. We were at this time, when I begin my story, just emerging from the bondage of Pring, and wondering if life was always to go on precisely as it now went on—never change, never alter.

Pring was a thoroughly good and trusty woman, but she was stiff in her opinions. She held that the whole duty of young gentlewomen was to take care of their clothes, hold themselves upright, attend to their manners with those above them, and refrain from familiar intercourse with those of the lower class. According to Pring's doctrine, the Miss Allinghams were never to speak to those beneath them, except to give an order, or to answer a humble inquiry as to how they did.

Pring, I need not say, made herself an exception to this rule, and both she and her particular friend Mrs. Bonnor, the housekeeper, though "they knew their places," did not scruple to exercise due authority over us, though it was, I must confess, always accompanied with a reminder "that young ladies like the Miss Allinghams should not do this, or should do that, because they *were* the Miss Allinghams, and they had an aunt a lady of title, and their papa had been next door to a nobleman, and would have been a nobleman himself if he had not been cut off in his prime, and left a widowed lady and fatherless little girls behind him."

These notions of Pring's were insensibly our law, and, hearing no other doctrine preached, it is but natural that we should all have had a very exalted idea of our own position, and that we showed no inclination to forget it.

The death of our father—who was, as Pring expressed it, next door to a nobleman (that is, the Honourable Primrose Allingham)—was a terrible calamity. He was thrown from his horse nearly at the door of his own house, and carried in to die. Our poor mother

lay insensible with grief—"struck dumb," as I have heard Pring say—till my birth roused her. My feeble cry called her back to life, but it was the life of a stricken woman.

She never regained either health or spirit. Always gentle and submissive, always dependent upon my father, she was from that day more or less of an invalid, and attended by Mr. Vidal two or three times a week. I think, as I look back, that in these days my mother would probably have had better advice than good Mr. Vidal's, whose strength lay in pills and draughts and leeches. I can now see before me the huge array of empty bottles, which were cleared out once a year and returned to the doctor—a habit common then with country practitioners, and explained by the far higher rate then paid for all glass and earthenware.

Bottles could not be given in with physic, of which a prodigious quantity was swallowed by chronic invalids like my mother.

Our house stood in the town, and was spacious, and rather imposing in appearance. A narrow strip of ground, railled off from the street, ran parallel with the front of the mansion, which was built of red brick, picked out with white, round the large entrance-door, to which we ascended by a flight of twelve steps, and also round the sixteen windows which looked out upon the high wall of the Priory opposite.

The entrance-door had an enormous shell over it, and above this, when any death occurred in the family, the shield or escutcheon was raised aloft, and in Pring's eyes was so important a feature that it ought at least to assuage any sorrow the death might cause!

This shield had been raised about a year before my story begins, when my uncle, Lord Allingham of Allingham Park, had died, leaving a widow who was his third wife, and a son by the second, who was a boy of eighteen.

The Allinghams of Allingham—and, be it observed, Pring and Mrs. Bonnor and Bellamy, the butler—always said “Alling’am.” The omission of the “h” in words like these was thought a mark of high breeding. No one thought of saying “Buckingham” or “Nottingham,” and Pring never thought of saying Allingham. This stately mansion, the home of my early years, was a trifle cold and dreary.

The hall was large, and though one of the windows on either side of the entrance were hall windows, they did not, by reason of their thick frames and small panes of glass, admit much light. The hall was paved in black and white checks like a chess-board; and the dining-room, with three windows, opened on the right; and the library, where my sisters and I pursued our education, on the left hand.

A broad staircase, painted a dull stone-colour, led to the upper floor; and here were two rooms looking out upon a large garden, where four elm-trees and three or four whispering poplars stood, and a great expanse of grass sloped down to the red-brick wall, beyond which was a kitchen garden, and a few gnarled apple-trees.

Flowers were not cultivated in our garden, with the exception of a few York and Lancaster rose-bushes, a jasmine and Ayrshire rose, which climbed up the house, and a few lavender-bushes and wall-flowers in

the spring. The gardener did not trouble himself about flowers.

The vegetables were enough for him, and of them we had a goodly supply. He had "cowcumber"-frames, too, and he forced "sparrow-grass," and his early potatoes were the earliest in the place, he said. Then there was a greenhouse, where a big vine grew and flourished, and my earliest recollections are of admission into the greenhouse as a treat, to gaze up at the big purple bunches hanging over my head, and wishing I could have just one bunch to keep—they looked too beautiful to eat.

Sometimes, too, I wondered what became of all those grapes. My mother was supplied with them, but we children had scarcely a taste, except when my mother would tell us, by way of a delightful surprise, to lift the broad green leaves from an old china plate on her table, and see what we could find.

Generally we found a cluster which, when divided by Judith, would yield us each perhaps four of the grapes, and my share was often the small ones nearest the stalk.

This sitting-room of my mother's was furnished after the fashion of the time, and, as I look back, I do not think it was very comfortable. There were chairs with thin legs and carved backs, and worsted-work seats ranged against the walls; there were cupboards, with brass wire across like a network, containing old china bowls and cups and saucers; and there were several large china jars on the floor, one between each of the three windows.

My mother's sofa was large, with bolsters at either

end, and a high back. Here she sat or lay, year in and year out.

My father's portrait, painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, hung above the high mantel-shelf; and there was a nest of tables near her hand, where a medicine-bottle and a glass always stood, with a few books and a piece of worsted-work.

My mother's bedroom opened out of this sitting-room, and she seldom, if ever, went downstairs. We sat with her by turns—Judith and Primrose oftener than I did, I think; but then they had two turns to my one.

Our education was carried on in the dull room to the left of the large hall-door, by a Miss Straight, who came to instruct us in writing, grammar, arithmetic, and the use of the globes. Miss Straight had taken us in hand when Pring gave up our education, and I dare say she did her duty. I did not learn much, but most likely it was my own fault. The Abbé Le Sage—a name fraught with wisdom—taught us French. If his accent was pure, it is more than his hands were. I shudder now as I recall his long nails with their mourning edges, the result of continuous application to his silver-mounted snuff-box.

At the time when my story opens I was fifteen, and considered by the good Abbé a dunce. I had to write exercises on rules that I never understood, and I never kept one of them, unless by chance. I made free translations from Telemachus that suited me very well, but did not make much sense; and I was continually turned back at the future of the verb "*aller*," as I too often began "*J'allerai*."

Miss Straight, the governess, would also look on

me as a very hopeless pupil, and the curls of her shining black front would shake and vibrate as she implored me to try to imitate my sister Judith, who was a young lady it was a pleasure to instruct.

We had also dancing and deportment lessons in the dining-room, where once a week the telescopic mahogany table was pushed aside, and we went through a series of steps and "curtseys," in which we were joined by little Mary Jane Vidal, our doctor's daughter, who was duly impressed with the honour of being admitted to have dancing-lessons with the little Miss "Alling'ams." I think I may safely assert that Mary Jane was almost our only link with the outer world. The Priory, which held its old name, but was really the Rectory where our Rector lived, contained no girls. The Rector had three boys, and it never entered into anybody's head that we could have any association with boys. Somehow my mother and Pring and Bellamy and Bonnor held boys to be a species of wild animal, that rampaged and made a noise, ate unripe apples, and bought squares of toffy at a shop in Priory Lane—things which the little Miss Allinghams could never even dream of doing. Besides, Mrs. Broughton was known to have relations in trade; for had not the Rector married her for her money, and had not the money been made in Bristol, or some such place, where real gentry, like "the Alling'ams of Alling'am," were unknown.

There were times when, standing on a high green-baize hassock in the old parish church, I had caught a glimpse of the Rector's wife—I had ventured to think her very charming. Her hair curled so prettily on her forehead, and her high bonnet was not so top-

heavy with plumes and flowers as many people's were. Then her boys certainly behaved well in church—better than we did—for they kept their eyes on their books, and they sang the morning hymn with a will; and surely Geoffrey was very handsome, with his dark eyes and thick clustering curls.

If those three boys had been our brothers, I thought, would not life have been brighter and merrier?

The organist of the church taught Judith to play on the harpsichord, and Primrose had lessons from our dancing-master on the harp. Primrose was our fair beauty; she had a most graceful figure, and she was universally allowed to be elegant in manners and appearance. Naturally, then, the position at the harp was one likely to show off her figure to perfection.

"It's like listening to an angel!" good Mrs. Bonnor exclaimed, when she was invited by Pring to come into the library to hear Primrose play one afternoon as a great favour; and Primrose blushed, and was graciously pleased to say that, if Mrs. Bonnor wished it, she would play the Minuet of Corelli's over again.

I can hear every note now echoing over the waste of years. I can see Primrose at the harp; Mrs. Bonnor see-sawing to the slow-measured movement; Pring nodding her head; Judith raising her arms, and going through the slow paces of the stately dance; and I, wishing I could remember the gestures and the steps as well as Judith did. But I always got into a maze, and a sharp reproof from Judith, and "Oh, Althea! how stupid!" roused me from my dream; and then, as if to complete the mental shock, the great hall-bell gave a long, loud peal. The fair harpist stopped;

Judith ran to the wire blind, and peeped over it; Pring and Bonnor took flight, to get through the hall before Bellamy opened the door; and Judith exclaimed, as she let herself down from the chair where she had knelt to make her observations:

"A high yellow chariot, and a coachman and footman; and I believe it must be Aunt Sackville and her companion!"

"Aunt Sackville—your godmother, Althea!" exclaimed Primrose.

"Aunt Sackville! it can't be—for mother said only the other day that she had heard nothing of her for two or three years. It can't be Aunt Sackville."

"You should not contradict like that, Althea; it is so rude," Judith corrected.

"And why should it not be Aunt Sackville;" Primrose said. "I hope it is, for she may have brought us a present; she did last time she came, for I remember it was our birthday, and she gave us each a plume for our straw hats, and Althea a brooch."

"Of course she did. Well, I wonder if mother will see her."

Again Judith knelt upon the chair, cautiously raising her eyes just above the level of the wire blind, and hoping to elude the observation of the fat coachman who sat aloft, and looked down from his box upon the world of Abbotsholme in general, and our library in particular, with stolid indifference.

"Yes!" Judith exclaimed; "keep back, Althea! she will see you—there she is! The footman can hardly prevent her falling on the pavement, she *is* so fat! and such furs—such a muff—and a star on her forehead! A velvet band with a star! How will she get

up the steps? And here comes a little thin woman in a black cloak, poor soul! she looks thin, and——”

Judith's description was lost on me. I had taken up a bold position on the chair of the middle window, and had seen all she described. Primrose, too, had possessed herself of the last window of the three, and saw as well as anyone.

Now, though this was a great breach of manners on our part—peeping over the blinds being one of the things which were considered vulgar and ungenteel for the Miss Alling'ams—we almost felt the importance of the occasion condoned the offence.

Judith, who was generally the sister to lecture us for breaches of decorum, was constrained to be silent, as she was in point of fact the first offender.

But presently sounds in the hall diverted our attention from the chariot, round which a knot of little children of that “lower class” of which we were to know nothing gathered, gaping with open eyes and mouth at the grand equipage. We all three came partially down from our elevation, and resting each a foot upon the carpet, while with our hands upon the back, and one knee on the seats of our respective chairs, we exclaimed almost simultaneously—“Hark!”

A voice was heard in loud sharp tones:

“Tell Mrs. Alling'am Lady Sackville would wish to see her; and make haste, will you? Where's Tugwell? My fan, Tugwell—my salts! These steps are like to kill one!”

Then there were murmurs of sympathy, and the sounds grew fainter and fainter, as it was evident my lady was ascending the stairs to my mother's sitting-room.

We three sisters waited in anxious expectation of what would come next. Visions of some possible gifts floated before our eyes, and, as usual, Judith repressed me as the youngest and the least important of the three, and begged me to remember that my choice of the gifts would come last.

I had gone back to my post of observation, and had forgotten that my head was above the blind. I was looking less at the fine fat horses, the high yellow travelling chariot, the stolid coachman, and the footman, than at the poor children gathered by the iron railings—when suddenly there was a commotion, caused by the rearing of one of the quiet horses, and the agitation of both, as their feet made a great clatter on the stone paving of the street.

What was it? What had frightened the horses, which the coachman could hardly keep in check? They plunged and curvetted, and were deaf to his entreaties of “So ho! so ho! gently.”

The noise sent Bellamy to the door, and we all three ran into the hall, and approaching as near as we dare, Judith said:

“What is it? What has happened?”

“It was a ball thrown right in the eye of the off-horse. There’s not a horse in Christendom could stand it!” the coachman, exhausted with his efforts to keep in the horses, exclaimed to the footman. “He is blinded in one eye, as I believe! Here, you fellow, get a pail of water, and let me swill his eye. So ho! so ho, my beauty!”

The coachman, having brought the horses to comparative calm, clambered down from his lofty seat,

and, still holding the reins, went to the horses' heads to examine the extent of the injury.

It turned out the horse was more frightened than hurt; and now the servants' desire was to find out the author of the mischief.

"It's one of you young 'limbs!'" Bellamy said, standing on the top steps, and waving his arms. "Be off with you, or I'll set the constable on you!"

The poor children scuttled away, and were soon out of sight, and the men continued their conversation.

"Might have dashed the coach all to pieces! Aye, and my brains out too!" said the coachman.

"It beats me, gentry living in a street like this here, where you can scarce turn a four-wheel, let alone a chariot." Here the footman stooped, and picked up the ball, saying, "It's as hard as a bullet; lawk! it might have killed thee, coachman, if it had hit thy skull."

"Aye, that's true! Tell you what, I'll just drive round to the inn, where we are to put up, and see if I can do aught to the poor creature's eye; it's blinkin' away like anything. And look at the sweat on 'em both—pretty nigh ruination to as fine a pair of bays as ever trotted."

"Well," said the footman, "you'll have to be sharp, for her ladyship could no more walk to the Mitre than she could fly."

"She ain't like to have wings," said the coachman; "they'd have to be a pretty stiffish pair;" and then he remounted his box, and the chariot moved slowly out of the street.

It had hardly disappeared when a small gate in the high Priory wall opened, and two boys came out.

The elder of the two ran lightly up the steps, and addressing Bellamy, who still stood with Pring a little in the background, he said:

"I was so unlucky as to throw a ball over the wall a few minutes ago. Our gardener hears that it hit a horse in a carriage standing here, and frightened it. I am come to make my apologies, and to ask if the horse is hurt."

"The horse, sir, is nearly blinded," Bellamy said solemnly. "The horse belongs to my Lady Sackville, who is paying a visit of ceremony to my mistress, Mrs. Alling'am. It might have been a very dreadful accident, sir—very dreadful indeed."

"But no one *is* hurt, really?" asked the other boy. "Pray satisfy us, for our mother is much distressed; our father is away from home; and we are very sorry. Can we see Mrs. Allingham, or Lady Sackville?"

"Not that I am aware of," Bellamy said; "leastways, sir, *I* wash my hands of conducting you upstairs."

Then suddenly the first speaker, Geoffrey Broughton, caught sight of us by the hall window. I was nearest to him, and he said:

"Could you please take me to see Mrs. Allingham? I am desirous of making due apology."

The bright boyish face was full of concern, the voice and bearing gentlemanlike, and the whole manner so widely apart from that of the "rough plagues" which we were accustomed to hear boys called.

"Miss Althea Alling'am"—it was the voice of Pring, as she emerged from the shadows of the other side of the still open door—"you forget yourself, to hold

parley with a young gentleman who has pretty nigh caused the death of men and horses."

"Oh! I hope not so bad as that, Mrs. Pring! Don't make me out worse than I am; but at least let me make what reparation I can. Let me go and explain matters to Mrs. Allingham. You will permit me to do so?" he said, turning again to me and to Primrose, who had drawn nearer.

And now the sitting-room bell rang, and Bellamy went upstairs. A sudden spirit of defiance came over me, and taking Primrose by the hand, as a sort of safeguard, I ran after Bellamy, and reached the door of the sitting-room, with the two boys behind me.

"Miss Althea Alling'am!" I heard Pring say; and I heard Judith exclaim, in her most reproachful voice, "*Althea!*"

But I did not heed them; I stumbled against Bellamy as he was coming out of the sitting-room, and he said:

"My lady wants to speak with you, Miss Althea; but go back, young gentlemen, go back. They know nothing of the accident," he said, laying his hand on Geoffrey Broughton's arm; "the sitting-room looks to the garden—they need know nothing."

Geoffrey drew himself up proudly enough.

"Unhand me," he said; "do you think I should be such a coward as to hide the knowledge of what I had done, from the lady whose horse I may have injured?"

And in another moment I had opened the door, and Primrose and I, having made our best curtseys, advanced to the end of the room, where, near my mother's sofa, sat the portly form of my godmother, Lady Sackville.

"Come hither! I vow I don't know which is which," Lady Sackville said; "and boys—boys—— Where did you pick up young sparks like these, Letty? I thought you had three girls; who are the boys?"

"Madam," said Geoffrey, as my dear mother looked appealingly at me and Primrose, and from us to the boys, and then at Judith, who now brought up the rear—"Madam, I had the misfortune to throw this ball"—extending the hard ball which he had taken from the footman to Lady Sackville—"over the wall of our garden; it hit your horse—one of your horses—in the eye, and thus caused both to prance and curvet, to the danger of the coachman, and the chariot, and——"

"What!" screamed Lady Sackville; "my horse blinded, my 'charyot' smashed, by a puppy like you!"

Geoffrey's colour rose, and I saw he was biting his lower lip.

"Oh," I said, "madam, Master Broughton has come to offer his apology; pray accept it."

"Accept it!" Lady Sackville said ungraciously; "I must first know what mischief has been done. Where are my people? where are coachman and valet? Tugwell, call them! Tugwell, do you hear?"

"If you please, your ladyship," I said, "the horses and chariot, and servants, have driven round to the inn, and I think no damage has been done."

"You think! Don't tell me of thinking! Go as I bid you, Tugwell, and bring me word what is the real upshot of this. As to you, you young puppy-dog—I suppose to the end of time puppy-dogs will play tricks, and endanger folks' lives. Thank my stars, I have no boys to be a pest, and you may say the same, Letty."

"Madam," said Geoffrey, "I think it would have been more kindly if you had received my apology with a better grace. But when my father returns this evening I will put the matter into his hands, and will not trouble you further now. Come, George." And then, with a bow and a heightened colour, but never for an instant forgetting that he was a gentleman, Geoffrey replaced the unhappy ball in his pocket, and followed the much-enduring Tugwell from the room. But at the door he turned, and looking straight at me, bowed and smiled; and then he was gone.

CHAPTER II.

THE PROPOSAL IS ACCEPTED.

"WELL, now let us come to a point," Lady Sackville said. "Which is my godchild?—which is Althea, my name-child? Why, don't stand there like frightened pigeons, as if I was an ogress—come!"

My mother looked so flushed and troubled, that I felt more sorry for her than I did for myself; and as Judith and Primrose were still silent, I approached Lady Sackville, and said:

"I am Althea, your ladyship."

"*You!* Why, you have not the good looks of your sisters, then, pale, thin—too thin. I like a little flesh to cover bones; it's more comfortable! But you'll do better to ride bodkin between me and Tugwell. So I suppose I had better hold to you, and not pretend that the vastly pretty girl with the pink cheeks is my godchild."

Lady Sackville laughed, and chuckled me under the chin; and calling Judith and Primrose to her, said:

"I dare say you'll make your way in the world, with your good looks and your wits. So perhaps it is as well that I should have the dull one."

"Althea is not dull," my mother interposed, disliking, as all mothers do, to hear a disparaging remark made about their children by others—"Althea is not dull, she is timid and quiet, and very good, Aunt Althea."

"Well, well, I'll take your word for it; and you two come and tell me what you can do."

Judith spoke up now; her dark eyes flashed. There was a spirit in Judith which could ill brook the patronizing tone my lady adopted.

"My sister plays the harp and sings. We can both acquitted ourselves as young gentlewomen ought; and our mother has given us a proper education."

"Houghty toighty! we are vastly clever, are we? Too proud to accept a present, eh?"

"Oh no, madam," Primrose ventured to say; "we were grateful for your last gifts."

Primrose loved pretty things, and she did not wish to lose the chance of possessing some.

"Well spoken! So here is a golden guinea apiece for you, and you can buy a trinket, if there are any to be purchased in this dead-alive hole. But I don't give *you* a guinea, Althea. You are to come with me to Windsor, and I'll show you the Royal folks, and the Castle; and I'll take you to town, perhaps; and—well, if we get on together, I will give you plenty of fine things."

Judith's brow grew dark.

"It is hard," she said, "the youngest should be put over the head of the eldest. *I* should like to see the grand things in town, and——"

A beseeching look from my mother stopped Judith, and I, quite in ignorance of what Lady Sackville had proposed for me, drew nearer to my mother, and putting my hand in hers, I said:

"What is it Lady Sackville is going to do? I do not wish to leave you—and home—and——"

My voice faltered; I was very near bursting into tears. My mother pressed my hand, and said:

"Dear child, your godmother, my aunt, will take you with her in her chariot to see many new places; she is on a tour with her friend Mrs. Tugwell, and she is staying a day or two at various towns. It is a great thing for you, Althea."

But I could not answer—my heart was too full; and though the prospect of seeing the world was bright enough, yet I shrank from my loud-voiced godmother, and said:

"I will give up my place to Judith or Primrose."

"What is that?" Lady Sackville said; "what is that? Give up your place? Oh! this is a pretty way to bring up your children, Letty! Teach 'em obedience, and to be good-tempered and pleasant-mannered, and you give 'em a fortune. But scowls and sulks and tears don't suit me! I came here to make a proposal half the girls I know would jump at. And, forsooth, these little minxes demur, and whine; and one wants this, and t'other doesn't—and so they'll just fall between two stools. For if I take one of them, it will be Althea; and if I don't take her I don't take either—or any. There! that's my mind! and I'll give you

till to-morrow to make up yours. I wonder what has come to that slow-paced snail, Tugwell? Oh, here she is! Well, what news?" as Bellamy threw open the door.

"The chariot is at the door, my lady, and the horse is none the worse—so the coachman bid me say."

"Then I'll drive back to the Mitre; and I'll send Tugwell round to-morrow by ten o'clock, to know your pleasure. I start at eleven, for I must not be late on the road. Here, Tugwell," and Lady Sackville extended her hand, and poor Mrs. Tugwell gave her a lift out of her chair, and placed the gold-headed stick in her hand.

"Dear Aunt Althea," my mother began, "I'm sure it is very good of you to think of my children. Your godchild shall be ready to-morrow; but will you not stay and drink tea? We have dined, for my children keep early hours, and I never get downstairs; but I beg you to stay and drink tea with me. Bellamy will bring a table and the urn to the fire, for it is chilly enough."

But my lady was not sufficiently well pleased with us to do anything so friendly as to drink tea. Evidently she was in high dudgeon, for she had expected my mother would be full of gratitude for her offer, and that I should be jumping for joy.

I never felt less like it; and yet there were, as there always are, two sides to the picture. To see new things; to see Windsor, where the King and Queen lived; to be able to come back to quiet old Abbots-holme, and tell everything about the gay world—*this* was surely delightful.

If only my godmother had been a different sort of person! had not had such a loud voice, nor such fat cheeks and big hands! I had my dreams of what fine ladies ought to be. I had a habit of peopling a fairy-land with images; and the lords were always courtly gentlemen in this ideal world of mine, and the ladies full of grace and pretty ways—not large and stolid, and with big hands covered with rings, and nodding plumes from their hats, and bands of velvet on their foreheads with a broach in the middle! That velvet band! It was *the* feature in Lady Sackville's appearance which laid hold of me. It was then a very fashionable mode, and no doubt was useful in holding the stiff rolls of powdered hair in their place; but it made the young and fair look stiff, and by destroying the natural contour of the forehead, it marred its beauty.

No lady of my dreams ever wore a black band—no lady of my dreams ever talked in a loud defiant tone!

But then, my dreams were the dreams of ignorance, and, as I was soon told, "I knew nothing as I ought to know it."

My mother sent for me just before our early bed-time, and bid me sit near her on a low stool.

"I want to talk to you, my Althea," she said. "I have told Pring to pack your trunk, and you will go away with my aunt Althea to-morrow morning. Dear child, it is for your good. My aunt is very wealthy, and if she adopts you, you will have a great deal that I cannot give you; and you will see the world, and come back to us, glad that you ever went away. My aunt Althea has the entrance into the gay world; she

visits Mrs. Delaney, the wonderful lady who makes beautiful flowers; she goes into the highest society in London, and can give you lessons in many accomplishments. Pring has put in your best gown, and my brocaded dove-colour satin, and——”

“Oh,” I said, “mother dear, I do not want fine things. I am afraid of my Lady Sackville. She speaks so crossly to poor Mrs. Tugwell—she will speak the same to me.”

“That is only her manner, dear. She has a kind heart below a rough outside. Now do not weep, or I shall weep too, and tears always make me suffer pain in my side.”

I was just choking down my grief when Bellamy came softly in.

“The Reverend Mr. Broughton has called, madam. He would fain see you to offer apology for the accident to the horses.”

“I am greatly fatigued, Bellamy,” my mother said. “Make my compliments to Mr. Broughton, and beg him to excuse me this evening. Or stay! Althea, step down and ask Judith to see Mr. Broughton for me in the study, and tell him of my headache and fatigue.”

I went down at once. I had only seen Mr. Broughton in church. He had been our Rector less than a year, and though he had called upon my mother, I do not think she had been cordial in her reception; and Mrs. Broughton as connected with trade or commerce, was quite out of the Alling’am reckoning.

Now that the distinctions of class are fast vanishing under the sunshine of Christian charity, and

swept away by the swelling tide of progress, it is hard to realize what social barriers were when I was young.

Our horizon in Abbothsholme was a very narrow one, and we could not look beyond it.

When I got into the hall I found Mr. Broughton and his son Geoffrey standing there. The hall-fire was smouldering, and the oil-lamp gave a dim light overhead.

"Will you step into the study, sir?" I said; "my mother is much fatigued, and she would like my eldest sister to speak with you."

I had accompanied my speech with a profound curtsey, and the next moment I had opened the study door and said:

"Judith, mother wishes you to see this gentleman."

Judith was engaged in the very undignified operation of scraping the pulp of a baked apple upon the plate, and mixing it with brown sugar.

Our supper was always laid at eight o'clock, and Judith and Primrose had not waited for my appearance, but had evidently already eaten the lion's share of our frugal meal.

Judith rose from her seat and tried to be very dignified, as became the eldest Miss Allingham.

"I ought to crave pardon," Mr. Broughton said, "for disturbing young ladies at supper, but Geoffrey and I have come to inquire if any serious damage was done to the horse which his ball so unhappily hit to-day. He has already offered an apology, but he seems to think it was hardly sufficient, for the lady who owned the horse seemed much offended."

"She was very rude," Geoffrey said carelessly.

"No gentlewoman would have refused to accept an apology."

"My dear son," his father said, "that is a sweeping assertion. We must leave Geoffrey's cause in your hands, young ladies, as we cannot see your mother."

"The horse belongs to my godmother, Lady Sackville," I said. "She is staying for the night at the Mitre Inn."

"Well, we will not invade her there," Mr. Broughton said. "I have only just returned from a journey to Bath, and my wife, though it was late to intrude upon you, would not hear of delay in our tendering an expression of sorrow for what has happened. Boys must keep their balls within due limits in future."

Then, to our surprise, Mr. Broughton seated himself in one of the armchairs, and said:

"I am glad to be brought into contact with you three young ladies; we know you well by sight, but I have scarce ever had the chance of any talk with you. This is the place where you study, I suppose? I see globes, and books, and all the appliances of knowledge. Geoffrey and his brother have not so spacious a study—eh, Geoffrey?"

"No," Geoffrey said; "but ours is more cheerful, sir."

"He is plain-spoken, you will say," Mr. Broughton said, with a smile.

"Plain-speaking always answers best, sir," was the reply.

"True, Geoffrey; but there is a limit to plain-speaking."

Geoffrey shook back his thick curls and smiled at me.

"My Lady Sackville passes that limit, Miss Althea."

"Yes," I said, answering his smile; "and went a long way beyond it to-day."

Judith now interfered.

"It is not becoming in you, Althea, to pass judgment on Lady Sackville. She's is Althea's godmother, sir," she continued, "and Althea has the good fortune to be invited to start on a tour with her to-morrow in her chariot; they are to stay at places on the road, and, as my aunt lives near Windsor, our youngest sister will see a great deal that is denied to us. It is not fair!"

"But perhaps you will have cause to be glad," Geoffrey interposed; "to ride in a coach with Lady Sackville must be a dubious enjoyment!"

"I think so," I said. "I would gladly exchange with Judith, and remain at home."

"That sounds very pretty," Judith said, with the touch of superiority which always characterized her when she spoke to me. "That sounds very well; but as you know you are not to be allowed to change places, it is idle to say you would do so."

Judith's dark eyes were full of fire as she continued:

"But the time will come for us also, and we will not grudge you the seat of 'bodkin,' between that mountain of furs and that skinny persecuted little Mrs. Tugwell."

Geoffrey laughed; that merry boyish laugh that never made its cheery music in our large house; and Primrose, who was always retiring like our mother, now said:

"Althea will have the more room, as Mrs. Tugwell is skinny."

Mr. Broughton then went on to talk of other matters, and asked us if we were not coming to offer ourselves soon for confirmation.

Judith and Primrose were over sixteen, and I was fifteen; but the question had not been brought forward.

"The triennial confirmation takes place in the coming spring," Mr. Broughton said, "and I shall hope to get Mrs. Allingham's permission to take your names as candidates. Your godmother, Miss Althea, will of course approve."

Now, strange as it may seem to those who live in these later times, the office of godparents had come to be considered very much that of a giver of a name and of presents; and the spiritual side of the office was scarcely so much as thought of.

"I do not know, sir," I said, in reply to Mr. Broughton's question. "I dare say she would not object."

"It is her business to bring you to the Bishop at the proper age," Mr. Broughton said; "as, if you learn your Catechism, you must have seen."

It is true we had learned our Catechism, under Pring's teaching, but we were deplorably ignorant of the very first principles of religion.

"I hope you have learned your Catechism," Mr. Broughton continued.

"Of course we have learned it, sir," Judith said; "but I dare say we shall have to look over it before our confirmation. I know I heard my mother say that at some time Primrose and I must be confirmed, and be ready to go out into the world; though, I am sure, how we are to mix in any society suited to our

position, I cannot tell. I have hopes that our cousins at Allingham Park may renew intercourse with us. For Lord Allingham is our first cousin, and my father——”

Judith stopped, for she was sharp enough to see a smile of amusement on Mr. Broughton's face. It quickly vanished, as he rose and said:

“My dear child, confirmation is the step towards a higher and nobler inheritance than any earth can give. Whether for peer or peasant, that Catechism has rules of life which holds good for all. Faith and practice are there set forth in golden words. Re-open your Prayer-books, dear young ladies, and ponder upon the promises made for you in your baptism; and there you will see that when you take these vows upon yourself at confirmation, you will, as it were, be bound by the yoke of Christ, and to follow Him. An easy service, depend upon it, when compared to the bondage and slavery of the world, and the pleasure of it.—Now, Geoffrey, we must take leave.” And to my surprise Mr. Broughton laid his hand with fatherly tenderness on each of our heads, as he said at parting, “God bless you, my child.”

Judith did not forget to pull the bell-rope violently, that Ballamy might attend to the door, and show our visitors out.

“To think of his being a Methodist!” Primrose ⁵⁹ said.

“To think of his lecturing *me!*” exclaimed Judith. “It is no concern of his; and that boy standing there tilting the chair all the while!”

“He is a very handsome boy,” Primrose said; “and I liked his voice, it sounded so true.”

"It *is* true," I exclaimed; "he *is* true! How he came to take all the blame about the ball upon himself; and how well he bore Lady Sackville's rudeness!"

"I don't think you should call Lady Sackville rude," Judith said. "It was only natural that she should be angry with a boy who had hit her horse with a ball."

"She need not have called him a 'puppy-dog,'" I said, as I bid good-night to my sisters, and ran upstairs.

My room was at the back of the house, on the floor above that where my mother lived and slept. It was next to what we had called our nursery, and looked out on the garden and the trees. It was large, and had two windows with deep seats, where I had often spent dreamy and, I fear, idle hours.

Everything which happened on this day is impressed vividly on my memory. I see it all before me as I write, and I feel again the thrill of mingled pain and pleasure when I found my room strewed with my wardrobe, Pring kneeling by a high chest of drawers, and on the bed my mother's beautiful brocade, with a heap of lace and knots of ribbon. Pring had received my mother's orders to prepare me for my start in life, and equip me for the society of my Lady Sackville, and the grand folks with whom she associated.

Thanks to Pring, our wardrobes were always in order, and she was therefore not taken unawares.

Our winter pelisses had been made ready for the first cold day, and mine now hung upon a peg behind the door.

It was of invisible green cloth; and it was trimmed with a long, rather dark fur, called "marten."

My beaver bonnet and wide beaver hat were ready; the second winter of both, for we did not change our fashions in Abbotsholme, and a beaver bonnet lasted more than two years. There were caps to think of—for girls of my age wore erections of lace and bows of ribbon on their heads when dressed. And there were aprons with lace edging, and a great many such matters connected with the toilette which were out of date, as I was to find when I was in the gay world; but still I had everything which, according to the light vouchsafed Abbotsholme, was necessary for Miss Althea Allingham.

Pring went on with her preparations by the light of two thick candles, which stood on the bureau. •

The light they gave only made the darkness of the other part of the room visible. I did not attempt to assist Pring; she would not have allowed me to do so if I had asked her, and I did not ask her.

"You must wait a minute or two, Miss Althea, for I must clear the bed before you can get into it. If ladies *do* want to take children away from their proper homes they ought to give notice, and not come down like a thunderbolt, and expect everything to be got ready in a twinkling. Now, I'll just tell you where I put your fine things; don't go and make 'em as flat as pancakes before you get to Windsor. And mind you always fold the brocade in the creases; and as to the bows on your beaver bonnet, mind you stuff 'em all with the rolls of paper. I can't abide to see bows all squeezed together."

This and a great deal more Pring said, and I,

tucked up on my favourite window-sill, did not, I am afraid, take much heed to her instructions. I fell into musing as I watched the boughs of the old elms sway in the night-breeze, and by their movement make Charles' Wain play bo-peep in their branches; where the foliage of autumn was still very thick.

The tall poplars too, as they stood up straight and stiff against the sky, whispered their mysterious secrets,

The poplars always seemed to me to have a voice, and to-night they were telling me that I was going forth into the unknown; and that never, never again, should I sit at that window as the dreamy child, but come back a woman. The poplars did not say this in so many words; but I felt it was what they meant.

Was I sorry or was I glad? I hardly knew. There was a mingled sense of exultation in the new, and lament for the old, of which all of us know something. I wondered why such good fortune did not come to my brilliant, handsome sister Judith, or my pretty sister Primrose, instead of to me, who was by common consent considered the plainest of the three Miss Allinghams. Then Mr. Broughton's words came back, and I wondered how I could take upon me that easy service of Christ, of which he had spoken, instead of the service of the world. For was I not going out to see the world, and live in it?

Here my meditations were broken in upon by Pring's voice. I had not attended to all her instructions as to bows, and caps, and laces; but now her words struck not only my ear, but took effect on my inner consciousness.

"Allingham Park is not so far from Windsor; his lordship is at Eton—maybe you'll see him; and don't

you be put down, Miss Althea, by anybody. The young lord has a stepmother, and she is certain to try and put upon you if you see her; but you hold your head high, for, as I have heard, she was of no family herself. The young lord is your cousin, mind that—as much as the old lord was the dear master's brother, and your uncle. Blood is thicker than water, and one's own kith and kin are always to be held to."

This was rather a new idea to me. My mother seldom spoke of the Allinghams; and I do not think the present Lady Allingham and she had ever met. I knew my uncle had been a martyr to gout, and that he had led an invalid and recluse life for years; but I knew very little else, except that our relationship to him shed a reflected glory over us!

Now Pring's words suddenly awoke interest in me I had not felt before, and I said:

"Perhaps Lady Sackville will take me to pay a visit at Allingham Park."

"Of course she will. And mind you remember that your dear papa was next door to the nobleman who owned that place, and that you have a kind of right there."

Ah, what foolish notions these were wherewith to fill my little head! And how completely was I unarmed for the battle!

Something seemed to tell me so even then; and instead of pursuing my inquiries about Allingham Park, I said:

"Have you put in my Prayer-book and Bible, Pring?" for I remembered Mr. Broughton's words, "Re-open your Prayer-book, and carefully read your Catechism; and try to follow its direction."

"Your Bible and Prayer-book are put in safe enough; they are in the bag. If I had known about this journey, I'd have run up a new bag for your books, and other little things. But there, I am taken aback, and must do my best. Although I'm sorry to lose you, I know what is right, thank goodness; and a young lady of family ought to have her advantages."

We did not, I think, pursue the conversation much further, and I was soon after sleeping soundly in the tent bedstead, with the curtains drawn round me.

The tent bed was a compromise between a large four-post and a "tester." I do not know what would have been thought of uncurtained beds in those days; and all air and light were carefully excluded from our slumbers.

I woke in the dull autumn morning, with that strange sense of something unusual about to happen, which often comes over us before we can decide *what it is!*

When I peeped out of the curtains, the sight of my trunk and packages recalled to my mind the events of the day before. I became conscious also of a tap at my door, and a timid voice:

"Miss Althea!"

"Come in," I said; and then, very slowly, and with a frightened air, the door was gently opened, and there, to my amazement, stood Mary Vidal, our doctor's little daughter.

"May I come in, Miss Althea?" she asked.

"Yes. But what brings you? it is not eight o'clock."

"No; but papa was sent for early to see Mrs Allingham—she has had a bad night, and wanted

him. I heard you were going away, and I asked papa to let me come and bid you good-bye, for—for—— I am so sorry you are going; I love you, Miss Althea."

Little Mary Vidal, the apothecary's daughter, was looked down upon by our traditions, and this boldness of hers took me by surprise. But it is always pleasant to me to know I am cared for, and I accepted little Mary Vidal's declaration of affection with some satisfaction.

"Come inside the curtains, Mary," I said; "I am too cold to stand about till Pring comes to dress me. Is mother very ill?"

"No; she was tired with yesterday's visitors, so the servants told papa; and she is fretting about you."

"Then I won't go!" I exclaimed. "Why should I go?"

"Oh, it is right," Mary said, with a sigh. "You will be happy when you get away; only, don't forget us all, Miss Althea."

"Of course I shall not forget you, Mary. You are a dear little thing, and I am very fond of you."

"Are you really? That is nice," Mary said. "I shall tell Geoffrey that."

"Geoffrey? Do you mean the Rector's son? Do you know him?"

"Oh yes. I go and see Mrs. Broughton; and she is so good to me. She often talks about you, and would like to see you; but she says——"

"Go on," I said; "tell me what she says."

"She says she has asked Mrs. Allingham to allow you to go over to the Priory; but she refused because you must not associate with Abbotsholme people. Of

course I understand," Mary continued, "I am only allowed to come to learn dancing with you because papa attends Mrs. Allingham; and that it is an honour for me. Mrs. Broughton only smiled when I said so, and the Rector laughed, and asked me why. And I said, because Mrs. Allingham was a lady of title, and belonged to the aristocracy. Then he said something about that word meaning 'chosen out of the best,' and that we might all be aristocrats if we chose, and that to be a child of God was much higher honour than to be the child of a prince. But I don't quite understand," Mary said. "I only know I love you, Miss Althea, and that I cannot bear to think you are going away."

I pressed the child to my heart, and kissed her more warmly than I had ever done, and told her I should come back, and I would bring her some pretty present; and that I was sure Judith and Primrose would be kind to her at the lessons.

"Ah, so they may be," was the reply; "but they won't be *you*."

Then I asked her to tell me more about the Priory, and the boys there. Were they not very rough, and was she not afraid of them?

"They laugh loud, and joke, and make fun, but they are never rough to me," Mary said; "and I love Master Geoffrey—he is so handsome, and so gentle to his mother, and to everyone who is weak or old. If he is boisterous in the garden, he is quiet in the house. He is very clever, too, and he is to go to College. He has never been to school, because Mr. Broughton has taught him everything. Oh, I am sure you would like Master Geoffrey!"

"I am sure I should," I said. "I *do* like him; for, you know, he came in here last night about the ball; and he was so polite, and yet not stiff in his manners, but quite as if he had known us a long time."

Our conversation was now stopped by Pring's appearance. She did not at all approve of Mary Vidal's coming upstairs.

"Very forward of the child," she said. "I always thought, although she was so quiet, she was sure to take an ell if you gave her an inch. I don't hold with such manners; but there, what can you expect of a child brought up as she has been?"

Pring now went on with her preparations very quickly to make up for lost time. Poor Mary, after returning once to clasp her arms tightly round me, departed, as Pring asked sharply:

"And pray how much longer are you going to keep your papa waiting, Miss Vidal?"

"Is mother very poorly this morning, Pring?"

"She is worried and put about; the doctor says the sooner you are off the better. Bellamy has been to wait upon Lady Sackville with a note to say you'll be in readiness at whatever hour she is pleased to name. But it don't seem much like it," Pring said, in some excitement, as the Priory clock struck nine.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE ROAD.

ALL my good-byes were said, and, as the footman stood with the door of the yellow chariot in his hand, I was helped up the high step by Bellamy. Lady Sackville was vociferous as usual about the luggage, which was put into the boot, and demurred a little at my small trunk and bag.

A stool fastened on the seat of the chariot was my appointed place, and I had to sit upright and well forward. I did not feel my position so uneasy as a young girl of these later times might consider it; for we never were allowed to lounge, or throw ourselves into deep chairs and sofas. Then the position was a decided advantage, as it gave me a view from both windows, and I could also catch glimpses of what was coming, through the space between the high box-seat and the backs of the fat horses.

It gave me in these last moments a view of the hall; and I could see Pring wiping her eyes with her apron, and Judith and Primrose on either side of her—experiencing, I think, that sensation which comes as a surprise sometimes, when those with whom we have lived in the close ties of family life are separated from us. Judith and Primrose felt as I felt, I am sure; that though we had never thought much about it before, we knew now we did love each other. Bellamy was on the steps, and a dim group of maids, headed by Mrs. Bonnor, were just discernible behind.

It was contrary to our canon law that the Miss

Allinghams should come beyond the limits of the hall without their walking attire; and thus our farewells were pantomimic.

My adieux to my mother had been said while she lay in bed; and then I had much ado to control my tears. But my mother's "Don't give way, Althea; it will annoy my aunt, Lady Sackville," had helped me to choke back my emotion.

At last the final touches were given to the luggage; the footman mounted to his seat; the big fat horses struggled to start, and we were soon moving slowly out of the street and turning into the open road.

I have said that the wall of the Priory garden was directly opposite our house. The Priory itself fronted the road into which the chariot turned.

As we passed the iron gates, I saw the Rector's three sons standing on the high bank on either side; and as we passed they raised their caps, and shouted in their thrilling boyish tones, "Good-bye, good-bye!" and when the chorus subsided I felt sure I heard Geoffrey's voice alone, as he said "Good-bye."

"The young monkeys!" exclaimed Lady Sackville; "they will be throwing another ball after us, if we don't take care. Sit still, child; don't lean over like that. You must learn to be quiet, or we shall quarrel."

I sat still enough after this, as still as poor Tugwell, who, screwed up in her corner, was quite like one of the good children who are seen and not heard. She put her arm kindly round my waist and pulled me up upon my perch, from which, as I had leaned forward to look at the "young monkeys," I had slipped. Then Tugwell cared further for my comfort by pushing a small box under my feet.

"Thank you," I murmured, turning to get a full view of the patient face under the black drawn silk hood.

A sad, patient face—I can see it now; and I am glad when I think that the poor gentlewomen of those times, whom Miss Tugwell represented, are harder to find nowadays.

The road along which we went was not an interesting one, and the sound of the horses' feet kept up a regular rhythm. They never changed the deliberate, even pace, and the sound took words for me which changed with my thoughts.

"On—on—on—to Windsor—on—on—on. Back—back—back—to mother—back—back—back—again."

At last the staring at the flat landscape and the autumn-tinted trees and hedges began to have a soporific effect on me.

My brown bonnet wagged first on one side, then on another; and twice I received a sharp reprimand from my godmother as my head came in contact with her shoulder.

The painful effort of keeping awake seemed to engross all my attention. As fast as I tried to keep my eyelids up, and stare at a farmhouse on a slope, or a team of horses in a field, so would they insist in dropping over my eyes. Then even when I thought I was awake, and was looking at the Priory gate, I found I was dreaming, as a cross voice said:

"Bless this child! she is a great nuisance. Can't you keep awake when you're told, eh?" and a dig with the elbow accompanied these words.

"Lean this way," Tugwell whispered—"lean this

way;" and then I felt the kindly clasp of that kindly arm tighten, and, worn out with the excitement, and lulled by the monotonous "On—on—on to Windsor —on—on—on—on," I struggled against my drowsiness no longer; my beaver bonnet was untied, and I found the sleep and rest I needed on the arm of my kind friend. How that arm must have ached! and how I added then, as I fear I often added afterwards, to Tugwell's burdens!

We stopped to bait the horses several times, and the mail-coach from London passed us just as we entered Reading. We slept there that night, and I supped with my godmother, while Tugwell got the rooms in order, and made up the bed as Lady Sackville liked it.

The good supper, and several glasses of Burgundy, seemed to have a good effect on my godmother. She talked to me of my dress, and my accomplishments; declared she would make something of me at last; and finally asked me if I were prepared to make acquaintance with my relations at Allingham Park. "Because I shall drive there soon after our arrival. Indeed, we might pause on the way, only that might look too much like pushing you in."

"If you please, madam," I said, "I do not wish to be pushed in anywhere, if I am not wished for."

"Ha, ha!" laughed my godmother; "you will sing a different song soon. There is nothing like a little *push*. Ask Miss Burney—little Fanny, as they call her. She knows how to get into favour. We may get you about the Queen at last—who knows? And *then*, let me tell you, you'll have to be thankful to me all your days. Hold your head up; and don't let any

fellow take liberties with you; and say black is white, if such people as Mrs. Delany say so, or Mrs. Garrick, or Mrs. Montague——”

“Who?” I asked amazed. “Who are these ladies?”

“Oh! you won’t live in Windsor a week but you’ll know fast enough. Then there’s a Mrs. Hannah More. If you ever see her, and she tells you you must dress like a Quaker, and that routs and balls are wicked, you must put on a mock-humility face, and say, ‘Yes, madam, I’ll eschew balls, and I know my Lady Sackville is a worldling’—ha! ha!”

Much of this was unintelligible to me, and I need hardly say the names of these ladies were only names, unless it were Miss Burney. For I had heard Mary Vidal say, an aunt of hers had read “*Evelina*,” and that it was a wonderful book, written by a very young lady; and that no one knew for a long time who it was, till at last it was found out to be Miss Burney, and that she was very clever, only not so very young.”

Miss Tugwell’s supper had been put aside for her, and must have been very cold when she came in at last, and ate it in that sort of deprecating manner, which I learned to know was a part of Tugwell’s nature.

Evidently poor Tugwell had none of that quality which her mistress designated as *push*, and declared was of great value. I think myself poor Tugwell was sadly deficient in self-respect; but she had been a slave so long that freedom would have been scarce a boon to her.

After supper was cleared, I was told to read the “news,” which was brought up from the landlord’s room.

Lady Sackville was pleased to approve of my reading, and I suppose it suited her, as it sent her to sleep.

I was not conscious of this till I saw her leaning back in her armchair, with her mouth wide open and then Tugwell touched me, and said I might go to bed.

She had unlocked my trunk, and taken all my night-things out, and she offered to comb my hair and fasten it under my night-cap. I thanked her, and said "she was very kind;" but she only shook her head, and said, "It is my duty, my dear, though in this case duty is a pleasure."

There was not much to see at Reading: it was a dull, drizzling autumn day, and we started for our second day's journey about noon. The coachman took the road at his own pace, and had none of the meek submission of Tugwell.

He had determined to reach Windsor on the evening of the third day, and, indeed, the cold and ceaseless autumn rain which dripped over the great capes of the coachman and footman was enough to quicken their desire, at least, to attain their journey's end. Thus, in spite of a loud and angry remonstrance from my godmother that took no sort of effect on our charioteer, we jogged on through the slush and rain till we were within a few miles of our destination.

At sunset there was a clearness. The western sky became all aglow, and against its grand background of crimson and opal I first saw the great majestic pile of Windsor Castle clearly defined.

Our road lay across a wide heath, and after we had passed a little wayside inn, where the horses were

refreshed by a bucket of water, we resumed our steady, even pace.

The light began to fade, and Tugwell put her arm round me, whispering, "I hope we may not fall into the hands of highwaymen. I feel frightened!"

I think Lady Sackville shared Tugwell's fears, although she did not choose to own it.

We were getting nearer Windsor every mile now; presently four white roads met; and a sign-post stretched four ghost-like arms to the four points of the compass.

The coachman stopped a moment while the footman stood up and scanned the letters on the arm to the right. In this momentary pause, for it was scarcely more, the sound of horses' feet was heard at a full gallop; then there was a sudden cessation, and before the coachman could whip up our horses, a man's face was seen at each of the chariot windows, while the plunging and struggling of the animals told that their heads were seized by others.

A moment of horror, fresh in my mind now—a moment never to be forgotten. I remember now the voice—a courteous voice—the voice of a gentleman, which said:

"We will only trouble you, madam, for your well-stocked purse; or maybe a ring on your finger, or a trifle of that kind."

Poor Tugwell fell prone upon the floor of the chariot, crouching and uttering suppressed cries, while I was held dumb and still with fear.

"Come, madam," said the man nearest Tugwell's window; "be so kind as to make haste, or——" and then I saw the muzzle of a musket pushed across the chariot!

The horses plunged and resisted the iron grasp that apparently held their heads. The figure of a man was seen on the box, pinioning the arms of the footman; the chariot swayed on its high wheels from side to side, and every moment I expected we should be overturned.

I was taken by surprise by Lady Sackville's courage.

While Tugwell lay half dead with terror on the floor of the chariot, and I sat weak and cold with fear, my godmother was bold, and her loud voice did not falter.

"You craven! to rob a defenceless woman on a lonely road. Give you my purse? No, I will not give you a brass farthing! If you choose to take it by force, take it, and brand yourselves for ever as cowards!"

"Nay, now—do not be so hard on us," the voice said; "we must all gain our livelihood somehow, and if we live by the road, well, what odds?"

"What do you parley for?" growled the man at the opposite window. "Come, madam, here is your choice!" and again the steel of the musket flashed out of the dimness, as it caught the light of a dark lanthorn which was now turned upon us.

"Hold your tongue, Tugwell," Lady Sackville said, giving poor Tugwell a thrust with her foot. "This child does not scream and whine."

Then the light of the lanthorn was turned full upon me, and the more courteous of the robbers said:

"Nay, is it a living child? it is more like a marble statue. Now, madam," and the door was wrenched open, and in another moment the purse which Lady

Sackville would not give up, would have been forcibly taken from her, while the man with the musket was leaning forward to seize a ring from her finger, when a low whistle was heard; the crack of a pistol followed, and in a moment the highwaymen had disappeared; the horses were free; a heavy thud sounded as the man leaped down from the box; and almost at the same moment a party of gentlemen on horseback had galloped up, and one called out in a young ringing voice:

"Give chase! Seize them! Give chase!"

But another voice, an older one, said:

"It is better to succour these poor ladies. We might scour the country and not catch Black Barnaby; for I verily believe it's his gang. Prythee, madam, is anyone hurt?"

"No, sir; and thank you kindly," my godmother said. "The noise you hear comes from a poor frightened soul who has no more spirit than a sparrow. No harm is done. Get up, Tugwell; do you hear? This child sets you a mighty good example—she has not uttered a sound."

Poor Tugwell scrambled up dishevelled and trembling, while two of the gentlemen had dismounted and were administering some spirit from a flask to James the footman, who was almost as prostrate with terror as Tugwell herself.

The coachman's arms were nearly torn from their sockets by the brave efforts he had made to hold in the horses. He declared with a groan that he could not drive another mile that night, and we were yet some distance from Windsor.

As soon as the coachman had made this declara-

tion, the young gentleman who had spoken first leaped upon the step and said:

"Our place, Allingham Park, is within half a mile; if it will suit you, madam, let me beg you to proceed thither at once. One of my men will take you on at an easy pace, and either my uncle or myself will precede you and get rooms ready for you, where we shall feel proud if you will lodge for the night."

"Well! was ever anything more extraordinary?" exclaimed Lady Sackville. "Why, sir, this young lady is your own kith and kin! speak up, child, this brave young gentleman's courtesy demands an answer. Speak, Althea, and make your proper acknowledgment."

"My kinswoman, do you say? Uncle Baldwin, do you hear?"

The elder gentleman, who had been trying to restore poor James to some composure, now came round to the window, and said:

"To whom have we the honour of speaking?"

"To Lady Sackville, of the Croft, near Windsor; and this child is my goddaughter and the niece of the late Lord Allingham."

"And cousin to the present lord!" exclaimed the young voice; "but we must not stay and parley here, or we shall have Black Barnaby springing on us with some more followers. One of our fellows will mount the box, and I will gallop on, and leave my uncle and the others to guard you." And with that he sprang into his saddle and galloped away.

His uncle closed the chariot doors, and, mounting his horse, rode by our side, while we proceeded slowly, driven by one of the grooms, whose horse was

led behind by another of the men, and a third rode on the left side of our carriage.

Lady Sackville began to give way a little, now the strain was over; and indeed who could wonder? But her relief took the form of a severe rating of Tugwell, who still sobbed convulsively, and grasped my hand as if in it she found some support.

Highwaymen and footpads were in the reign of his Majesty George III., and for some years later, the terror of desolate moors and open commons, or secluded lanes. The gentlemen of the road, as they were called, were often real gentlefolk, who by some ill-conduct or perhaps misfortune, had taken to this wild life, and carried on these highway robberies with astonishing persistence and success.

Large fortunes were said to have been realized by men like Black Barnaby, who, as I afterwards heard, had a large following, and a system of operations so well organised that it was very rarely his people were brought to justice.

It was with a sense of security that we felt the chariot turn into the gate of a demesne, and heard the porter call out in a sonorous voice, "All well! His lordship is gone on before."

The gentleman whom Lord Allingham had called Uncle Baldwin, had not spoken many words to us as he rode erect by the side of the chariot, reining in his horse to suit the slow pace of our tired and frightened steeds.

Seldom had their equanimity been disturbed, and they, knowing the change of hand in their driver, refused to move beyond a slow pace, and the road along the park upon which we had now entered was

a slight ascent all the way. The dim light of the common became darkness in the avenue, for the stately elms, scarcely yet stripped of any of their leaves, overshadowed the way.

As we passed between the high iron gates they closed behind us with a loud click, and we heard the gentleman's voice after he had ridden a few paces call out, "Make all fast to-night, Giles."

"Aye, aye, please your honour; we will keep the scoundrels out."

I began now to awake to the novelty of my position, and to feel how strangely that introduction to my relations, of which my godmother had spoken as necessary, had been brought about.

After a quarter of an hour's slow progress we came to a sudden bend in the road, and then almost immediately it seemed to me we stopped before a door. An open door, a blaze of light, and then the servants came to the chariot-door, the steps were let down, and I, in my position of "bodkin," was the first to alight.

Two or three shallow steps ascended, I found myself in the wide hall, so brilliantly lighted by the huge wood-fire on the hearth that the large candelabra with its many candles was not needed. I can even now bring back the strangeness of that moment, as I felt my hand, cold and trembling, taken in that of a lady in deep widow's weeds, and heard her voice say:

"Welcome to Allingham, my little niece Althea, for Oliffe tells me he has found a kinswoman in distress. Is it not so?"

"Yes, madam," I replied; "we were in great peril from robbers when——"

My cousin Oliffe had been assisting his uncle to help my godmother to alight—no easy task; and I remember now when he had delivered her to Mr. Baldwin's care how he returned to the chariot and helped poor trembling Tugwell to get up the few steps, relieving her of her many burdens of parcels and baskets, and seating her gently on one of the wide oak-chairs into which Lady Sackville had sunk.

Mr. Baldwin made arrangements about the horses and the servants, and while he and my cousin discussed this with Lady Sackville, my new-found aunt said she would show us the guest-chambers, where she hoped we should make ourselves at home.

Two kind and helpful servants came to assist Tugwell, and our three comfortable rooms formed indeed a contrast to the poor accommodation of the inns at Reading and Slough.

"Dear heart," one of the servants said, "you must have been scared! many a traveller has been shot through the heart by those vagabonds."

"Oh, don't—don't!" Tugwell exclaimed, "or you will upset me again, and I shall never be able to make her ladyship's bed ready."

"We will do all that for you," the kind servants said in a chorus.

"But my lady sleeps so high; we always take the pillows about with us, and they have not been brought up; I must go and fetch them."

"You will do nothing of the kind," was the rejoinder of the younger servant, who departed on her errand to fetch the pillows, while the elder said:

"As to this poor child, bed is the best place for

her. Come then, let me put you safe in your nest, and I'll bring you up some supper; come."

I followed her unresisting. My room was the last of the suite, and all three opened out of each other.

"Why, so you are a Miss Allingham, I hear," the maid began. "I heard my lord say so when he threw himself from the horse at the door, and frightened my lady terribly. 'Mother,' he said, 'I have found a little cousin in the hands of thieves, and, like the Good Samaritan, I have brought her to my own inn; but you don't want to be paid for taking care of her.' That's what I heard my lord—I mean Lord Allingham, you know—say to her ladyship; and she shook her head and told him to be serious, and not make a Bible story fit his own so lightly. But he is so full of fun and spirit as never was, and Mr. Baldwin is like a wet blanket on him, and on everyone else for that matter. Her ladyship has something to put up with; but she is an angel."

It must not be supposed that all this time my comfort was neglected. The kind woman—who was named Mrs. Bean, and was the head of the house department, as Mrs. Cox was head of the kitchen and stores at Allingham Park—placed me in a chair before the bright fire, divested me of my pelisse and wraps, unfastened my large beaver bonnet, smoothed the bows and strings as carefully as Pring herself could have done; and then, chafing my cold hands in her large warm ones, she said:

"Before I put you to bed I'll fetch a warm drink, and a bit of cream-cake or pastry; you look half-starved."

"I—I have been so frightened," I faltered; "and

I have come away from everyone—Judith, and Primrose, and mother, and Pring—and I feel so lonely; and oh! I wish I had never come at all."

"What! the old lady is a bit of a tyrant, I expect; hark at her now!"

For Lady Sackville had at last made a progress upstairs, and her loud grating voice was heard declaring that she should do her best to have the wretches brought to justice, and scolding Tugwell in her most forcible style. Like the soft notes of an organ when compared to the blast of a trumpet, I heard another voice, clear and gentle and musical in its tones, soothing and quieting:

"The child Althea is gone to bed, I suppose; that is well." And then with these words the connecting-doors were closed, and all was still, except indeed the murmured sounds of my godmother's high-pitched lamentations and complaints, of which poor Tugwell had the full brunt to bear.

Mrs. Bean returned in a few minutes with a tray of dainties, which she placed on a table by my side. She watched me eat and drink with evident pleasure; and presently a tap at the intermediate door was heard, and Tugwell appeared with my night apparel, my comb and brush and such requisites.

"Thank you, Mrs. Tugwell," I said. "I hope you are going to bed now."

Tugwell shook her head.

"I have a great deal to do first," she said with a heavy sigh; "and when I do get to bed I shall see nothing before me but those fearful wretches. Oh, my dear Miss Althea, when the muzzle of the gun was pointed, then indeed I gave up hope!"

"You should never do that," said Mrs. Bean cheerfully; "you should put your trust in God, and remember His goodness and mercy." Suddenly Mrs. Bean stopped, and saying, "There is my lady," she put a chair near mine, curtseyed with due respect, and motioning to Tugwell to do the same, she left the room.

"My dear," Lady Allingham began, drawing her chair closer to mine, and leaning forward to me—"My dear, this has been a very alarming adventure for one so young. It is wonderful to think how God shapes our course; though we cannot see the Guiding Hand, we *feel* it is over us. By the attack upon the chariot made by these lawless people you have been brought to a house which I trust may be as a home to you in future. You are welcome here, Althea."

I scarce knew what to say. I was but a child in years, and I followed the impulse of the moment, forgetting all the restrictions which Pring would have laid on me. I rose, and throwing myself on the large rug before the fire, I clasped Lady Allingham's hand in mine, and burying my face in her lap, cried out with sobs and sighs:

"Oh, you are so kind, and I am so glad to be with you!"

I was not allowed to remain in my lowly position. I was gathered to the gentle bosom which throbbed with sympathy for my forlorn condition, and I heard a whispered exclamation:

"How comes it that her mother has entrusted her to a woman like Lady Sackville?"

The whisper was involuntary, and came from the depth of that kind heart. But I said:

"My mother thought it would be for my good to see the world beyond our quiet home; and though I wished my beautiful, clever sister to come instead, my godmother would have me or no one, and so I came. Mother thought it would be for my good."

"And so let us hope it will prove, my child," was the low and tender reply.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE PARK.

In that never-to-be-forgotten conversation with Lady Allingham, I learned much of the position of the family which I had not known before.

It was a mystery to me then, and there will ever be like mysteries, why a gentle creature like my uncle's widow should have consented to be his wife. She was many years younger, and she had certainly not undertaken the charge of Allingham Park and its irascible master because she loved wealth and rank, or set an undue value upon them. She told me that my late uncle had been a good friend to her mother, and saved her from misery by his generosity and goodness.

"Perhaps," she said, "gratitude moved me first to accept his proposal to be his wife, and I have never regretted it. Dear Oliffe has had always a friend at hand, and he needs one. Oliffe is full of spirit, and gets a little wild at times; but love restrains him when nothing else would do so. He has just left Eton, and will soon be going up to the University. His uncle is apt to be a little hard on him, and I act as the mediator. Mr. Baldwin is the brother of the first Lady

Allingham, and has taken up his abode here with his wife for some years. Another of my dear husband's kind deeds, and hardly appreciated as it ought to be."

"Then he is not my cousin Oliffe's uncle."

"No, not by the tie of blood; but he takes care of the estate, and was left by my husband co-trustee and guardian of Oliffe with myself. For by an old family institution to which my lord reverted, the Allinghams have not been declared of age till they are twenty-five."

"I have not seen Mrs. Baldwin," I said.

"No, dear child; she is an invalid."

"Like my mother!" I exclaimed.

But Lady Allingham shook her head.

"I should doubt if the cases are similar," she said. "Mrs. Baldwin is but seldom seen about the place; she lives in the south wing with her maid and caretaker." Then I remember my kind hostess said: "I must be Aunt Norah to you, and I hope we may be fast friends. You know nothing of Lady Sackville, I suppose?"

"Nothing, madam, except that she is my godmother, and my mother's aunt, her father's sister."

Lady Allingham sighed.

"I do not think you will remain long with her. I know her only by report as a person who enjoys a large fortune left to her by her husband, who was a city magnate of no great refinement. Lady Sackville has society at her command—I mean such society as wealth commands; but it is not such as may be wholesome for one so young, I fancy. We are within a few miles of Windsor, and I much hope the beginning of an acquaintance founded on a relationship may grow

and ripen." Then to my surprise Lady Allingham said: "Shall we pray together before I leave you?"

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The thought flashed through me that my new friend was a Methodist, and I think I gave a nearly imperceptible movement which might be taken for distaste.

Never in my young life had I knelt down as now, and heard the words of extempore prayer. They were few and simple, but they seemed addressed to One *near us—present* with us—not to the far-off Almighty, to whom, up to this moment, I had said a formal prayer night and morning—with my lips, but not with the heart.

I remember now that that sweet voice asked the Lord Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, to take care of the lamb who had been sent forth into the wilderness of life. "A dangerous wilderness, without Thy rod and Thy staff; and a safe resting-place if Thou art with her." A strange sense of peace, mingled with a little awe, crept over me. And when at last Lady Allingham pressed a last kiss on my forehead, I could not utter a word; and scarcely had my head touched the pillow when I fell asleep.

The sleep of youth, so sound and so refreshing, that when I woke the next morning I felt that spring of hope and eagerness to find out some new thing in my new life, which no adverse circumstances were sufficient to repress.

Shutters carefully excluded the light, and there were curtains drawn over them; curtains hung round my bed; and yet through all there was the penetrating light of day—that blessed light which peeps through

every crevice, and which shutters cannot altogether exclude.

I slipped out of bed, and walked across to the door, turned the handle gently, and looked out. My room was at one end of a long corridor; and at the other there was a large window like the window of a church. In at that window the brilliant sunshine of a bright autumn morning was entering through panes of many-coloured glass, which marked the polished oak boards with many radiant hues.

I closed the door hastily, and returned to my darkened chamber. How much I then wished I had not been so dependent on Pring, and that I could perform my toilette unassisted! But I drew back the window-curtains, mounted on the window-seat, and lifted the iron bar which fastened the shutters. The undulating park lay before me, where the bracken was taking a lovely bronze and orange hue, and where the deer could be seen standing knee-deep amongst the high stems of the plumpy fronds. Every golden leaf of the great elm-trees of the avenue had a fringe of diamond drops, and the whole scene was one of great beauty.

I determined to dress myself without Tugwell's assistance, and managed at last to present a fairly respectable appearance. I concealed any deficiencies with my travelling-cloak, to which was attached a caleche or hood, and by this I contrived to keep my hair up.

When I was ready I opened the door again, and advancing cautiously I found myself half-way down towards the window, and at the head of a narrow staircase.

Stepping quietly, as if I were guilty of some misdemeanour, I ventured downstairs, and then came to a glass door which was open.

Although the house was quiet, some person had evidently been before me, for I noticed a large glove lying on the threshold. I picked it up and laid it on the ledge of a window of the little lobby upon which the door opened; and then I stepped out into the morning sunshine.

How beautiful it was! Something in me responded to the loveliness around me; I seemed to be a part of it, and as if I had suddenly come into possession of an inheritance. Mine was but a child-heart, but it throbbed with a sudden sense of the majesty and beauty of the world of nature; and I think from that very time the trees and flowers, and the sky, and the air have been a joy and a solace to me in the pathway of life—that pathway upon which I was taking the first steps of the long journey now nearly ended! As I look back, that morning of sunshine is mine again, and I hear the rustle of the crisp air in the trees, and the tinkle of a stream that ran through the park making music clear and sweet, as it bid the reeds and blossoms on its banks, rejoice in the brightness of the autumn day.

I crossed a broad terrace walk which lay before me, and descending a few stone steps where the lichen grew unheeded, I found myself at the entrance of a path which led through the belt of low-lying copse, skirted by tall trees at the south side of the park.

The music of the stream guided me, and I was soon on a path running parallel with it, where the golden shafts of the morning sun pierced the shadows,

and made the waters gleam as they danced merrily along. The long grass by the side of the stream was heavy with dew, and my feet and the edge of my cloak were soon very wet.

But I went on, in the very gladness of my heart forgetting time and place, and forgetting that I was in a way playing truant, till I was suddenly called back to the actual from the ideal, by coming at a turn in the path upon a young gentleman, who was fishing in the stream. He had just cast his line upon the water when I appeared; he turned his head but he did not speak, though he smiled at me.

I stood still watching. Presently there was a sudden twitch at the line, then a skilful and swift movement of the rod, and a struggling trout lay on the bank, and my cousin Oliffe said:

"Pardon my backwardness to wish you good-morning, fair cousin; but I knew this fellow was about to rise, and not for all fair cousins in the world could I have missed the chance. He is a fine one indeed," he continued, as he took out the hook, and the poor trout, struggling no longer, lay quietly on the grass to die.

"Poor thing!" I exclaimed; "I am sorry it has to die—to die on this lovely day, too."

"You have eaten fish before, I suppose?" Oliffe said; "and you don't cry when you see them lying fried on a dish, instead of dead on a bank by a stream." Then the fishing-basket was opened, and the trout consigned to it, to keep company with three more of his family; and my cousin said his morning's work was over.

A trunk of a tree lay near the path, and my cousin invited me to sit down there and rest.

"Let us have a talk," he said; "we are kinsfolk, you know. What brought you here with that vulgar old woman whose chariot so nearly fell into the hands of Black Barnaby last night?"

"My mother sent me with my godmother to spend a few months with her, to see everything I could never hope to see in our quiet home at Abbotsholme."

"What things?" he asked.

"Oh, Windsor, and the King and the Queen."

"And the little mouse under the Queen's chair?"

I thought he was laughing at me, and I said, taking no notice of the interruption:

"I hope to learn a great deal, as well as see a great deal; and I assure you my sisters envy me my good fortune."

"Oh, you have sisters, then? Are they like you?"

"No; they are both much handsomer than I am. They are twins—Judith and Primrose. Judith is dark and clever, and Primrose——"

"Is fair and silly."

I did not like my cousin's manner, and I rose from my seat, saying:

"If you will excuse me, my lord, I think I ought to return to the house."

"Not yet, little cousin. Have I offended you? Nay, do not look so high and mighty! and I pray you leave the hood to fall back. I like to see your hair in such disorder, and I like to look at you."

The hot colour rushed to my cheeks.

Perhaps after all my mother was right, and boys and young gentlemen were apt to be rude. Somehow

I did not think that Geoffrey Broughton would have spoken thus.

I turned resolutely away, pulling up the hood of my cloak, and pulling it also well over my face.

Oliffe slung his fishing-basket over his shoulder, adjusted his rod and tackle, and followed me.

I walked as fast as I could without running; but my cousin's long strides soon brought him up to me.

"Now do not be cross, my little lady," he said; "I am well pleased to have your company, and I beg you not to shun mine. You must know we want a little amusement here, for Allingham Park is not a lively place."

"It is beautiful!" I exclaimed. "Oh, look at the deer!" as an opening in the trees showed a glimpse of the park, where some deer were lying with their heads just above the tall bracken; and others were running in a herd of twenty or thirty, down a gentle slope.

"Yes, it is beautiful; but one can't live on raptures about woods and streams. There are plenty of both here; but there is a lack of money, so my worthy guardian says. I have a strong idea he feathers his own nest snugly enough, and leaves me to pick up the sticks wherewith to build mine. He got round my poor father, and made him decree I was not of age till twenty-five. Did you ever hear such folly?"

"It is a very long time," I said, for twenty-five seemed *old* to me in those days.

"I should think it *was* a long time," was the reply. "And here I am going up to the University with a beggarly allowance, which our parson would be ashamed to make his son. It is a great misfortune to have a fictitious uncle for a guardian, and that is the truth."

"You have a very, very good stepmother," I ventured to say. "She was vastly kind to me last night."

"O yes; she is, as you say, very, very good—a little too good for me; and yet I love her, just because I can't help it. My own mother was not Uncle Baldwin's sister, you know; and they say the first Lady Allingham had no high lineage to boast of. My father married her in haste and repented at leisure—so they say. Come now, fair cousin, I am telling you all this branch of family history: return the compliment, and tell me of yours."

"Indeed, my lord, I have but little to tell. We lead a dull life. My mother is never robust or well. Mr. Vidal, the doctor, and his little girl are our only visitors. Mary Vidal comes to take dancing-lessons with us; we scarce know any other folks in Abbots-holme."

"That is a pity," Oliffe said; "an apothecary's daughter does not sound very attractive."

"But Mary is—is quite a gentlewoman in her manners; and she is—very fond of me."

"Oh! so *that* gives her a claim to your kindly feeling, fair cousin. Well, I only hope you will extend your friendship to others on the same ground—not to everyone, however; for I declare there will be a good many who will put in that claim for your favour."

I scarcely understood what Oliffe meant; but I gathered that he was willing to be on friendly terms with me, and I said, in the formal fashion which I had been taught to consider the right way in which to address those in a higher position than myself:

"I thank you, my lord, for your kind opinion, and I hope I shall not forfeit it."

To my surprise and vexation, my cousin laughed merrily.

"Look you, Cousin Althea, I do not desire any formality between us; drop 'my lord,' and give me my name, Oliffe—say Oliffe—it is not hard to pronounce."

He had got a little in advance of me, and now paused, looking down into my face with his clear bright eyes.

"Come, give me my name, as a cousin should; and give me a kiss to seal our compact of friendship."

But I stepped back, and the thought flashed through me quick as lightning:

"I am not a child, to be kissed by him! how could he dare to ask it?"

The sudden gesture of recoil which accompanied the thought seemed to make my cousin grave.

"I crave pardon," he said, more seriously than he had yet spoken; "I crave pardon, Cousin Althea; do not resent my over-boldness."

The change of tone and the change of mood struck me at once, and I said:

"Pardon is granted, Cousin Oliffe;" and then I hastened towards the house, for the bells were ringing from the clock-tower, and I saw Tugwell advancing towards me with uplifted hands.

"Where have you been—where have you been, you naughty child? Her ladyship is angry with me, of course. It is too bad, that it is, to bring me into trouble—I declare it is!"

"I am very sorry," I said humbly. "I could not help going out into the park, it is so beautiful."

"Beautiful!" said poor Tugwell; "yes, I dare say it may be, for those who have time to look at it. But what a figure of fun you are, with your hair all loose, and your gown wringing wet, and a great rent in your cloak! I can tell you, I can't be your slave and mend your garments. No; it's bad enough as it is, without your making it worse!"

All this time, while poor Tugwell had been lamenting in her shrill, querulous treble, my cousin had been waiting a few paces behind. He now came near, and doffing his hat, as if Tugwell had been a duchess instead of a poor waiting-woman to Lady Sackville, he said:

"Let me take the blame, madam. I should have warned my cousin that the grass by the river was wet, and I should have protected her mantle from the brambles. But I am sure Bean will make it all right before breakfast, and I will call her, with your leave."

This courteous speech won Tugwell at once; and when Oliffe hastened into the house to summon Bean, she said:

"What an affable young gentleman my lord is! It's not often I am spoken to in that fashion!"

Tugwell was right. That air and tone of superiority, that challenge of those of the higher ranks to dare their inferiors to overstep the boundary line between the people and the aristocracy, was in my early days so common, that an exception to the almost universal rule was always looked upon as something remarkable.

Hence, as I was soon to see exemplified at Windsor, there was a great deal of fawning and cringing before

the nobility and the princes of royal houses, if, indeed, any intercourse were admissible.

That "we are members one of another" was a truth kept in the background, if, indeed, it were accepted as a truth at all. The beautiful unity which ought to subsist between the members of one body was little understood. The baleful influence this pride of place engendered was soon to be seen by its bitter fruit.

For may we not say, that the utter forgetfulness of the poor, and the absurd distinctions of rank—which were carried to such an extent that it would almost appear that the prince and the peasant were of a different species, and divided the one from the other by an impassable gulf—lighted the torch of Revolution in France; a torch that kindled a fire which burned fiercely throughout Europe, to the utter destruction of peace and prosperity.

At the time of which I write, when, as a girl of scarce sixteen, I came out of my retired home to see, and hear of what was passing in the world, we were standing within a few years of those days when the streets of Paris ran with blood, and the innocent suffered for the guilty. For Louis XVI. did but reap the bitter harvest, sown broadcast by the selfish exclusiveness of his predecessors, and perhaps more particularly by le Grand Monarque, Louis Quatorze, whose only motto was "Le roi le veut," and who ignored altogether the claims of the poor and the destitute throughout his reign of upwards of half a century.

I must beware of moralizing as I write the story of my life, but my readers must be patient with the

reminiscences of an old woman, and consider how in all the changes and chances of a long life it would be strange if there were not a tendency to look beyond the surface, and discover the root whence many things good as well as evil spring. Under the rule of our beloved sovereign the good is likely to be an ever-widening and perennial stream. And may I not say that the fountain whence it takes its source for the safety and moral health of her people flows mainly from the purity of her domestic life, as the wife, the mother, and the Queen?

We breakfasted in our rooms. Mrs. Bean brought me mine of rolls and eggs and sweet new milk.

Tea was never served at the morning meal, and was considered an unwholesome beverage for the young, even later in the day. Mrs. Bean attended to my toilette and my wet stockings and shoes, and my cloak and gown were taken off to dry.

Tugwell produced a chintz skirt from my box, with a low bodice, over which I wore a thick muslin kerchief, and my beaver bonnet was exchanged for a cap, the border of which Pring had taken such trouble to crimp, and settle its frills and loops for state occasions.

I wore over this a wide-brimmed hat, and when I started in the chariot Lady Sackville ordered Tugwell to tell me I was to be covered with a loose sacque that would not crumple my kerchief. This was a sacrifice to appearance which I did not expect, for the autumn day, though so brilliant, was cold, and I had but few smart things in my wardrobe.

"My lady thinks you should be seen here at the

dinner-hour to advantage. We are to dine at one o'clock to suit her convenience, and the chariot is ordered round by three o'clock. Poor little lady," Bean said as she surveyed me, after she had put the finishing touches to my dress, "you look younger than your years."

"I am near sixteen," I replied. "Judith and Primrose are near seventeen."

"And you might pass for twelve," was Bean's reply. "I am not very clever at hair-dressing," she said; "but I hope the curls are firmly placed. It would be good for you to learn to dress your own hair."

I felt this was true, and that my dependence on Pring was a misfortune.

We all met at the early dinner-table, at the head of which sat Lady Allingham, and my cousin Oliffe at the bottom.

Lady Sackville confused me when I appeared by saying:

"Houghty toighty, we are quite the mode this morning; your waiting-woman, my lady, knows how to turn 'a sow's ear into a silk purse.'"

I blushed crimson with vexation, and could scarcely murmur a reply to Mr. Baldwin's "Good morning" and stiff bow which he rose to give me.

"She thinks I mean she is the sow's ear, my lady," Lady Sackville said, laughing at my discomfiture; "while I mean that with her hair well dressed and her cap and hat adjusted she looked more presentable than in the old poke-beaver and cloak."

I heard a murmur from my cousin Oliffe of—

"Polite and genteel, *very*, to attack you like that!"

I raised my eyes to his gratefully, and I saw in them a light of sympathy and kindness which acted like a reviving draught.

Lady Allingham had much ado to keep up the talk with my godmother. Her loud harsh voice was so unpleasant, and her remarks anything but those of a gentlewoman.

Was it my utter ignorance of the gay world that made me think if Lady Sackville were a specimen of its votaries they were vulgar and far from genteel? I had yet to learn that there are those who are nature's gentlewomen, and that no accident of wealth or rank can give the ring and stamp of the true metal to the baser coin. I had yet to learn that courtesy and refinement of thought and feeling flourish best where the Christian banner, irrespective of outward circumstances, is that under which men and women "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time."

The chariot came round at the appointed hour. There was a great deal of packing and arrangement to go through before we started, and while this was going on, Lady Allingham took my hand in hers and led me into a little ante-room, where there were signs of needlework, and shelves full of books, and a canvas on an easel.

"This is my little 'sanctum,'" she said. "I hope I may see you again ere long, and, my child, if you are in any trouble or difficulty you are to remember I am within a few miles of Windsor, and that I shall always be glad to be of service to you. Do you like writing letters?"

"I have had not much need to write letters," I re-

plied, "for we are all at home together, and this is the first separation."

"Ah, that is a happiness that cannot last. Here is a little book in which you can write of anything that interests you, and here is a box of pens and some paper. Use both, if you feel disposed, and write to me if you think I can be of use."

Then Aunt Norah, as she again bid me call her, kissed me affectionately; and Oliffe came into the room to say all was ready, and that the "bodkin" was wanted to take her place in the chariot.

I thrust the box of pens into my large pocket, and pressing my book closely, I hastened away.

That book in white vellum cover, with a silver clasp, is before me now, yellow with age, and showing signs of many years' service.

As I write my story I often refer to it, and the autumn morning when, on our way to Windsor, I turned over the blank pages, seems to come back to me.

On the first leaf of the book was written:

*Presented to Althea Allingham by
Norah, Lady Allingham,
On the tenth day of October, 1785.*

"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths."

My companions slept heavily during the drive. My godmother doubtless was drowsy after her hearty dinner, while poor Tugwell slept from sheer fatigue.

I had thus plenty of time to think over the events of the last few days, and I felt as if years had passed away since I had left my mother and my sisters and my old home at Abbotsholme.

CHAPTER V.

NEW FEATHERS.

THE Croft was a spacious house, on the outskirts of the town of Windsor, but within sight of the Castle.

My godmother was received by her women-servants in the lobby, and she called out:

"Let the blue room be made ready for Miss Allingham, my great-niece, Cracknell; and she is to receive respect, do you hear?"

Cracknell was the superintendent of the little household, and to judge by appearances she had an easier time of it than poor Tugwell. She was nearly as stout as her mistress, and a great deal more good-natured.

I was taken to my room, the blue room, by this good woman, and she hoped I should be comfortable, and that I should find some amusement.

The window of my room looked out on the road; and Cracknell told me by kneeling on the window-seat I could see the Castle. The flag was flying from the Round Tower, showing, Cracknell said, the King and Queen were at Windsor.

The young Princesses, she said, lived at the Lower Lodge; and one of them, Princess Elizabeth, had been very ill.

An open chariot passed at this moment, and Cracknell, leaning forward, said:

"That's old Mrs. Delany in that landau, and Miss Burney, a wonderful young lady who writes books. I never read 'em, for the good reason that I'm no scholar; but folks say she has made a pretty fortune

by them. You'll go and make a visit to her, I'll be bound; for my lady visits Mrs. Delany, and, indeed, there isn't a house where she doesn't get a footing! It's the way of some folks, you know," and Cracknell laughed. "To think of her bringing you here!—a young creature like you! Well, I hope you'll be comfortable. As soon as the chariot is unpacked, I'll send your box up; but you look so spick and span, you'll not need to change for supper."

At this moment another maid appeared, and she was followed by my box, borne on the shoulders of the useful man about the place, who let it down with a thud upon the floor.

"I say, Mrs. Cracknell," the maid began, "the chariot was stopped by highwaymen last evening. Saul says there was a piece of work: Mrs. Tugwell fainting, and my lady shouting; and there was the click of a musket; and then a handsome young gentleman rode up with some men, and the robbers went off helter-skelter!"

"Deary me! what a story, Mary Anne! You know I always take in half what *you* say as gospel truth."

"Well, you needn't believe me, if you don't choose. Ask the young lady, then."

"Yes," I said, "it is quite true, we were terribly alarmed; and if my cousin, Lord Allingham, had not ridden up, I do not know what would have become of us."

"Saul says the coachman's arms were well-nigh torn out of their sockets, tussling with the horses. Lor! it scares one to think of it. And only last week some of the household at the Castle were stopped by

foot-pads afore it was dark. I declare the country is as full of pitfalls as it can be, and nobody is safe."

"Your tongue runs away with you, Mary Anne, like a young horse that wants a bridle. You'd better be looking after Mrs. Tugwell, and trying to help her, than chattering here like a magpie."

"You like a bit of talk yourself, Mrs. Cracknell, and—"

"Hold your tongue, Mary Anne! and go about your proper business, which isn't staying where you ain't wanted."

Mary Anne shut the door with a sharp bang; and Mrs. Cracknell, after saying she could not stoop to unpack my trunk, very soon departed.

I saw very little of my godmother during my first week of coming to the Croft. She was much occupied in what she called shaking down into her nest; and the arrangements for my education and instruction in the deportment necessary for high society were rather in the background.

They might have remained so for some time longer, had I not been brought into contact with Mrs. Delany and Miss Burney in a somewhat remarkable way.

It was the custom of the royal family to come on the terrace at Windsor Castle, and take their exercise there; while the public were admitted to look at them from a respectful distance.

It sometimes happened that the King would make an observation to some one who was nearest to him, and the Queen would give a stately bow and smile, while the young Princesses and their ladies would demurely follow next, and walking stiffly behind their parents, bow when they bowed, and smile when they smiled.

I had been in Windsor about a week, when my godmother ordered Tugwell to attend me to the terrace before the Castle, where the royal party were likely to take an airing that afternoon.

My godmother, as I saw, had always been a little doubtful about my appearance, and she scanned me very narrowly when I was ready to start with Tugwell.

"Humph!" she said; "if you had the bearing of your sister Judith, you would attract attention even in royal circles; but as it is, you'll only just pass muster in a crowd. I must not delay getting you rigged out in better style; but this will do for to-day. Hold yourself erect, now; and take care to edge into the front row. Don't get elbowed back, Tugwell; you are such a poor creature!"

It was remarkable that Tugwell always accepted all that my godmother said of her, without any show of resentment, and never attempted to defend herself.

I had felt life a little dull since my arrival, and having written a letter to my mother, which had to await a frank from a friend of my godmother's, and recorded in my diary the events of my visit to Allingham Park, I had found time hang heavy on hand.

It was therefore with great satisfaction that I found myself walking with Tugwell down the street towards the Castle. Several handsome landaus and chariots passed us; and gentlemen with their grooms in attendance rode past on fine horses.

Then I knew enough of history to look with interest at the Castle itself; and in my dreamy fashion I was thinking more about poor Henry VI., who passed so much of his time shut up in the Castle, while his wife fought pitched battles in many parts of the

country, than I was thinking of King George III. and his Queen Charlotte.

There were a good many fashionably dressed ladies and gentlemen on the terrace, and they paraded up and down laughing and talking, waiting the appearance of the royal party.

The view from the terrace was all aglow in the autumn sunshine, and I looked for the first time on that lovely landscape, where the towers of Eton were shining in the light, and the noble river, quiet and majestic, made its course through the valley.

So engrossed was I with gazing on that charming landscape that my godmother's injunctions were forgotten; and Tugwell and I were certainly not in the front row, when a murmur ran through the crowd that "The King was coming."

There was a general move backwards, and I was close against the parapet.

"I cannot see the King and Queen," I said. "Oh, I am so sorry! I came on purpose to see the King."

Then a gentleman just in front of me said kindly: "Poor little lady! she ought not to be disappointed. Keep close to me, and I will get you into the front rank by the time the royal folks pass again."

"And Mrs. Tugwell too, sir," I said.

"Never mind me, my dear," Tugwell said. "I've seen his Majesty scores of times."

Presently a little vivacious lady, with a very bright face, exclaimed:

"Father! father! Come forward, sir! The crowd are following the King and Queen! What child is that whose hand you have taken? Leave her, father, or you will lose the chance."

The kind gentleman answered rather wearily, I thought:

"What if I do, Fanny? I care not."

"But I do care, sir," was the quick answer. "Come forward. See! these ladies wish it."

"Dr. Burney, do not hide. Nay, sir—you should be vastly proud to see your accomplished daughter brought forth into the light of royal favour. And is that little lady another daughter?" asked the same voice.

"Nay, madam; this little maiden was thrust against the terrace wall, and I heard her pitifully exclaim that she came on purpose to see the King; so I gave her my hand, and bid her follow me. Now then," the gentleman said kindly, "now you can see."

I stretched my neck and stood on the tips of my toes; and, still clinging to my kind friend's hand, I saw the procession of royal folks reappearing.

The King and the Queen! The King had a pleasant face, with blue eyes, very full eyelids, and a cheerful jaunty manner. He seemed to leave all stateliness to the Queen, and her Majesty's mother, and the Princesses.

Presently the Queen stopped quite near us; and stooping, questioned the lady next to whom the little bright-eyed Miss Burney was standing. Then the King approached, and we heard his Majesty's quick questions addressed to Miss Burney, repeating:

"What—what—what!" and "And—and—and—why—why!"

I did not hear very distinctly what was said; and my kind friend Dr. Burney, although I dare say pleased at his daughter's notice from royalty, looked sad and ill at ease.

No notice was taken of him, and though, when the procession passed, he had a bow and a curtsey from the King and Queen, it was Fanny, his daughter, who had the chief notice.

Dr. Burney was very good to me; he declared he would take me home to Mrs. Delany's, and that we had begun a friendship through similar feelings of disappointment.

"I am not disappointed now, sir," I said; "I have seen the King."

"Aye, true, child, and the Queen into the bargain."

"Perhaps I ought to return to Mrs. Tugwell now," I said, looking back to the spot where poor Tugwell was yet leaning against the parapet.

"Go to the wall and keep there!" Dr. Burney exclaimed. "Well, well; give me your name, little lady, before we part."

We were just about to fall back to Tugwell, when my friend's vivacious little daughter, having separated herself from some grand ladies, returned to her father.

"Come now, sir," she said; "we will resort to Mrs. Delany, and take our new friend with us."

"It must be a short visit," Dr. Burney said, "for we must hasten homewards ere it is dark; things do not look very bright, my daughter."

"Oh, but they do!" little Miss Burney exclaimed. "I would as lieve their Majesties had accosted you; but cheer you, father mine. I shall win; you know I always win."

I did not then understand to what Miss Burney alluded, or that she was seeking a place as lady in waiting to the Queen. Such was, however, the case; and, as the event proved, little Fanny did "win."

As I walked with my new friends to the town from the Castle, Tugwell following, Miss Burney seemed to have forgotten my existence, so taken up was she with her own affairs; laughing, and chattering to her father of all that the ladies had said. Then she told how the King put his face right down under her shady hat, and, looking into her face, tried to catch her half-inarticulate replies to his questions.

When we reached Mrs. Delany's house, Miss Burney rushed past the servant who opened the door, and entered a parlour to the right, where she threw herself on her knees by an armchair where an old lady was seated.

Then there was such endearments and exclamations of every kind, that I, being wholly unaccustomed to such demonstrations, stood transfixed on the threshold.

Child as I was, and unversed in the ways of the world, I detected that Miss Burney would not have been ill-pleased if Mrs. Delany had promised to mention her desire as to the place about the Court to the King, and solicit his favour. But the old lady, although she returned all Miss Burney's expressions of affection with great warmth, let drop that his Majesty had already done so much for *her*, in giving her the house in which she lived, that she could not ask further favours, even for her "sweetest and dearest Fanny."

Dr. Burney kept up a running-fire of "No, no—of course not, madam—no—no;" and then Fanny suddenly remembered my presence.

"Here is a little maiden my father has befriended on the terrace. Come forward, child, and make your curtsey to my sweet Mrs. Delany."

I obeyed rather reluctantly; but the old lady's gentle voice attracted me.

"My Lady Sackville's godchild! I had heard of her arrival, and that she is Miss Allingham, a niece of the late lord's. Welcome to Windsor, Miss Allingham."

Again Miss Burney interrupted.

"Thank my sweet Mrs. Delany for her kind words, child."

Then, speaking of me in my presence, a habit which is not to my mind a sign of good breeding, she continued:

"We found the poor little thing huddled up against the terrace wall, and near crying with disappointment because she could not see his Majesty."

"Nay, now, Fanny," Dr. Burney said, "you use the wrong pronoun. It was I who found our little friend, not you; and she was not crying, nor near it."

"No, indeed, sir," I ventured to say; "but I was very pleased to get a hold of your hand, and to see the King and Queen."

"And what did you think of them, my dear little lady?" asked Mrs. Delany, in her gentle voice.

"If you please, madam," I replied, "they looked very much like other gentlemen and ladies."

"What a delightful little puss it is!" exclaimed Fanny. "She expected to see the crown on the King's head, and a sceptre in the Queen's hand! Sweet little innocent!"

I did not like to be laughed at, and I felt the colour rise to my cheeks, and tears were not far from rising to my eyes.

Mrs. Delany came to my rescue; she directed my

attention to some most beautiful flowers made by her own skilful fingers, saying:

"I can scarce see them now, much less make them, for my eyesight is all but gone; but God is very good to me, and I have yet fair memories, wherewith I feast my mind's eyes. Make my compliments to my Lady Sackville," she continued, "and say that I shall be pleased if she will excuse the formality of a visit from me, and do me the favour to call, and add to the pleasure by bringing you with her."

As I went to examine the flowers, which were indeed most curiously wrought, I heard Miss Burney carrying on an aside of talk about me.

"An Allingham of the same family as the young lord! How strange that she comes hither under such auspices! My Lady Sackville is not—well——"

Mrs. Delany interrupted with:

"She has a kindly heart, though the external may be a little rough."

"Always a kind word for everyone!" Miss Burney exclaimed; then, lowering her voice, she said:

"Is not the ménage a queer one at Allingham? My lady a Methodist, my young lord under the domination of a soi-disant uncle, and some folks say another heir in the background."

Mrs. Delany held up her finger in warning, for I had turned from the cabinet which I was examining, and my eyes were fixed on Miss Burney.

"Little pitchers! ahem—well?"

"I must take leave now, madam," I said. "My lady's companion, Mrs. Tugwell, is in the lobby, I think." I curtseyed, and kissed Mrs. Delany's hand.

The dear old lady kindly drew me nearer, and kissing me on the forehead, said:

"Adieu, au revoir, my child."

Then Miss Burney took me in her arms, called me a sweet delightful treasure, and said, "Dr. Burney must win everyone's thanks for picking up such a gem!" To which Dr. Burney said:

"Tut, tut!" and murmured something about little Fanny's rhapsodies. "But we must make due allowance for an authoress, if she does live in the clouds," he said. "It is not every girl of Fanny's age that has written books which all the world applauds."

I thought then as I walked away with Tugwell, who had patiently waited in a little anteroom on the opposite side of the lobby, that though it must be a grand thing to write a novel and win favour by it, I did not think this authoress as charming as her books.

I never changed my opinion, though I often saw Fanny Burney afterwards, and though I heard her extolled on every side, and heard she was the favourite lady about the Queen. Somehow there did not seem reality about her; and yet, what right had I to say that, when so many good folks, especially Mrs. Delany, loved and appreciated her for herself as well as for her books?

As her good father said, the authoress of "Evelina" and "Cecilia" lived in the clouds, and soared far above commonplace mortals, who had not so much sentiment at command on every occasion.

My life at the Croft began in earnest the next day. The dancing-master and the French master were engaged. The mantua-maker arrived with patterns for

new gowns, and my hair was submitted to a good deal of combing and brushing, preparatory to being dressed according to the mode. If I had been behind my years hitherto, I was now to be before them. My sixteenth birthday, on the first of November, found me very much changed in appearance; and when I entered the parlour on that day, being told by Tugwell that a visitor was awaiting me, I cannot wonder that my cousin, Lord Allingham, exclaimed:

“Fair Cousin Althea! Is it possible only a few weeks have passed since we parted?”

“You have not hastened to find me out, my lord,” I replied, in the would-be stately manner that I had been told was the proper one.

“Ah! there has been a reason, fair cousin. We have had illness at Allingham; a fever has taken off one of the household, my uncle Baldwin’s wife, and my mother is scarcely yet recovered. Thus we have been shut out from the world. Let me look; what is it? What has changed my little cousin? Ah! I see; they have made a woman of you since the day when we walked by the stream in the park.”

“My godmother has wondered much you did not notice us,” I said; “she made me think you were too fine to do so!”

“Made you think! Who dares to *make* you think such flummery? Let me see the old lady and make amends.”

“My lady does not come downstairs till near the dinner-hour, at two o’clock.”

“And you, what do you do?”

“I practise my dancing-steps, prepare my French verbs for Monsieur de Lamée, and read——”

"Read, and pray what? Miss Burney's novels, I'll warrant."

"No, indeed; you make a mistake. I read what books I can lay hands on. Milton, and the *Spectator*, and *Rambler*; old volumes, but so interesting, and I found them all in a cupboard upstairs, where no one goes but me."

"And in the library at Allingham you could have every book worth reading, if you were only there." And he sighed. "If I had a sister, life would be more tolerable; but it is fast becoming intolerable. My mother, good as she is, is terribly Methodistic. Poor soul, she is too weak now to get about at all; and I am left entirely to the society of a man I could knock down any moment with pleasure—my soi-disant uncle Baldwin. *Could* you ever hate anybody, Cousin Althea?"

"If they ever gave me cause," I said.

"Cause! he gives me cause enough. He keeps me short of money, and tries to order me about like a baby. Stopped me from Oxford till the next term all through spite; pins me down to read with an oily tutor, and in short makes my life miserable. To see him shedding crocodile tears when his poor half-witted wife was buried; to know, as I did, that he had not been near her for weeks through dread of infection, and to smell him of camphor wherever he goes. Phaugh! he is odious."

"Was it an infectious fever?" I asked.

"By-the-bye, they said so. Are you frightened?"

"No," I replied; "but my godmother would be frightened, if she knew."

"They called it an intermittent fever; but the

poor woman whom it carried off was as weak as a fly, so no wonder she died. Would you be allowed to take a turn with me? I sent the horses round to the stable."

"I should like to come vastly," I said; "but——"

"Come, then, what hinders you?"

"I must ask permission first," I said; and I hastened to my godmother's boudoir, where she always sat, partially dressed, till near dinner, while Tugwell read the news, and arranged her toilette for the day.

My tap at the door was answered by "Come in;" and after curtseying and kissing the large fat hand held out to me, I said:

"My cousin, Lord Allingham, is below, madam. He would fain accompany me for a turn in the Castle grounds."

"So he has found you out at last. You may tell him that I thought he was too fine to visit the Croft; but now he is come, I can't turn him away. Bid him dine at two with us; and tell him, with my compliments, he is welcome. Better late than never."

It did cross my mind that I ought to mention about the fever at the Park; but I dreaded, if I did so, that I might lose my chance of a day in my cousin's company.

So I curtseyed my thanks and left the room, my godmother shouting to me to put on my best velvet hood and the elegant crimson cloth sacque which had replaced Pring's green pelisse.

I did not then know what was in my godmother's mind, nor that she looked forward to an alliance with Allingham Park as a reward for her generosity to me. I forgot everything in the delight of a free walk, unaccompanied by Tugwell.

My only variety on this promenade was a drive before dinner with my godmother, when we paid visits of ceremony to the neighbours. The windows were always closely shut, and the pace of the horses slow, and the sound of their hoofs so monotonous that I had generally much ado to keep awake.

It was a bright winter's day, and I set out with my cousin in high spirits.

We went through the town to the long drive, and soon branched off towards some of the glades and dells, which were touched with the breath of a hoarfrost, and were dry under our feet.

I remember only a sense of freedom, and the thrill of joy in finding Oliffe so like what a brother might have been to me.

I was proud to belong to him—not because he was Lord Allingham, but because he was so bright and clever, and so handsome that several of those who were riding or driving in the Park turned to look at him.

He asked me about my sisters and my home; and I chatted to him with that delightful freedom which is born of confidence. He laughed as I described Pring, and her grand notions of our importance as the daughters of a gentleman who had been 'next door to a nobleman.' And what would Pring say could she see me, I thought, on such familiar terms with one who was really a nobleman?

Oliffe had always the power of changing rapidly from gay to grave; and after a silence he surprised me by saying in an altered tone:

"I am thinking of making off to the West Indies, or the East Indies—it won't matter which. How can

I go to the University with an allowance like that, this guardian of mine suggests? It is ridiculous—it is absurd! With this title at my back, and known to be the possessor of a place like Allingham Park, what can I do when I mix with my equals but live as they live. It was bad enough at Eton; it will be a thousand times worse at Oxford. I shall run into debt over head and ears, and then have to leave the country. And then won't some one I know be pleased! Why, if he could get rid of me he would be master, indeed! What do you say, little cousin?"

"I should say, you must not get into debt; that it is wrong, and—and—"

"Well, go on—and what?"

"Ungentlemanlike."

"My dear little cousin, you are wrong there; it happens to be *the* thing to do."

I could not reply to this. The world, and what was "*the* thing," and what was not "*the* thing," was becoming a sore puzzle.

"I should have thought," I went on, "that it was not honest to get what you can't pay for."

Olliffe laughed—such a happy boyish laugh—and then he said:

"You are a good little soul—almost as good as my mother. When will you come and see her, and walk by the riverside again with your humble servant?"

"Some day," I said. "You must invite my godmother also."

"Rubbish! we don't want her. But I will be on my best behaviour to-day, and tell her all her dishes are excellent, and her wine must have come from the King's cellars."

He did all this, and more. My godmother vowed he was the most delightful young man she had ever met. She was in her glory when, after dinner, we were summoned to the parlour to see visitors. Just the visitors my godmother liked should see on what easy terms she was with the handsome young Lord Allingham—Fanny Burney; and a Miss Dewes and her brother, guests of Mrs. Delany.

My godmother introduced Oliffe with a good deal of ceremony, and Miss Burney was bent on charming him.

At this distance of time I can yet recall Miss Burney's rapid conversation and gestures all so descriptive of what she was telling. Mr. and Miss Dewes were doubtless more accustomed to hear Miss Burney talk than we were, and I fancied I saw an inclination to yawn on Miss Dewes' part; and, as she turned to examine the flowers, she murmured:

"How often shall we hear this story, I wonder?"

The story was of the Court, and the great folks connected with it. Princess Elizabeth's dangerous illness; and that she had been bled twelve times in two weeks! Is it not a marvel that anyone lived who got into the hands of the doctors in those days? Now, at the time in which I am writing, to take the blood is considered, and justly, as taking the life, and even leeches are used with caution.

"The dear creature," Miss Burney said, "was better, and was trying James' Powders."

It sounded very grand for us common mortals to hear our little lively visitor say, "The King told me," and "The King exclaimed."

My godmother shewed her appreciation by sundry

ejaculations; and Oliffe, leaning on the back of a chair, was listening with amused interest.

"Think how I felt!" Miss Burney exclaimed, "when in the midst of some Christmas games we had been showing Miss Dewes, his Majesty walked into the room. We all stood stock-still—didn't we, dear Miss Dewes?" Miss Dewes nodded assent. "The King stood in the middle, and there were we all round him! Imagine, my dear Lady Sackville, how I felt, when the King went all through the history of '*'Evelina'*,' that my father had told him; of the discovery, and of his surprise! I felt as if I must positively sink into the earth, and *die* of confusion."

"You looked as pleased as Punch," Mr. Bernard Dewes here interpolated; "not a bit like dying."

"Oh, you naughty thing!" said Miss Burney. "Who believes you?"

"Pray go on, my dear Miss Burney!" my godmother said, in her loud deep voice, which was such a contrast to Miss Burney's treble. "Pray go on! it's so kind of you, I am sure, to treat us to these particulars; it is vastly amusing, and so I am sure his lordship thinks."

In very truth, few women could talk like Miss Burney. She had great command of language, and her eyes were so brilliant, and her little hands accompanied every word with an appropriate gesture.

"Well," Miss Burney continued, "as Miss Dewes knows, the King came close to me and said, 'What—what—how was it? How came you to write? How happened it? What—what?' 'I only wrote, sir,' quoth I, 'for my own amusement in odd hours.' 'But your publishing; your printing—how came it about?'

Oh, how confused I got; how abominably bewildered! You *will* all laugh, as well you may, when I tell you what was my reply. It is too foolish; *too* silly. I said, '*I thought, sir, it would look well in print!*' The King burst out into fits of laughter, and then went on to beg me to write more books, and—but I see I must stop, or you will all go to sleep."

She did not stop, however, and I, at least, was glad; and then she told how the Queen came; and how their Majesties would not believe that amongst her accomplishments the clever Miss Burney could not play on any instrument.

"Now, I dare say," she continued, "that pretty child," pointing to me with her fan, "plays divinely."

"Oh no, madam," I replied; "but I have two sisters who play: Primrose on the harp, and Judith on the harpsichord."

"Delightful! Let them come to Windsor and play to the King. I'll manage it. We'll get Lady Bell Finch to preside, who, dear soul, says gravely, 'You tell me there is a difference between a psalm, a minuet, and a country-dance, and I am bound to believe you; but they are all alike to me!' There! tell your sisters that, child. And now I must deliver my message to you, Lady Sackville. My sweet Mrs. Delany asks the favour of your company, and that of your charming little god-daughter, to drink tea to-morrow afternoon. And—who can tell?—the King and Queen may pop in again. My lord," she said, rising and turning to Oliffe, "may we presume to ask for the honour of your company?"

Oliffe bowed his acknowledgments, but regretted he could not avail himself of the invitation.

"Ah! we are too prosy for you, I see. Ask Mr. Dewes if we don't send him off into fits of 'the gapes.'"

Oliffe took the bait thrown out, and proceeded to say that "Where Miss Burney was, there must be all that could be desired of wit, beauty, and grace."

She flipped him on the arm with her fan, and said "He was a sad flatterer, and she was inclined to be affronted."

But her smile and looks belied her words; and after my godmother had said she would be proud to accept Mrs. Delany's polite invitation, the little lady fluttered away, kissing her hand and smiling; while Mr. and Miss Dewes followed in a more sober fashion.

Oliffe took leave soon after; and then Lady Sackville went over all that had passed, and told me I must play my cards well, and I should win; and then said she, "Your mother will have cause to bless me to the latest day of her life. You can have your sisters to Allingham Park, and——"

"I do not understand, madam," I said. "My sisters to Allingham Park?"

"You little fool! Are you pretending to be innocent? I never can quite understand you. Look you, my little lady, you must marry Lord Allingham, and build up the fortunes of your family."

I was too angry to speak. The rude hand that had so roughly torn aside the veil which guarded the inner shrine, which my maidenly reserve had guarded, was a terrible shock. I burst into a fit of angry tears, and exclaimed:

"How can you say such things to me? Oh, I cannot, cannot bear it!"

"Houghty toughty! you silly little creature, don't

be a baby! Sixteen is the age when girls begin to know they must be wooed by some one; but not everyone is wooed by a lord. I confess I like the thoughts of the alliance vastly. Now dry your eyes, and get your pretty bit of needlework, and be thankful you were ever brought to Windsor! There!"

I left the room, forgetting my wonted curtsey at the door, and ran to my own little chamber, and throwing myself on my bed, cried as children cry, in a great flood of weeping, which soon expends itself.

After all, it was foolish to take to heart what was meant as a compliment only. The notion of playing a game, of plotting to win a lover, was simply terrible to me. Was it possible that Oliffe thought the same? How he would hate me and despise me!

And then his image rose before me, and I heard his greeting again, as he said, "Why, they have made the child into a woman!"

And now, as an old woman, I wish to record in these pages, my protest against that habit of jesting with young girls about possible lovers, and the badinage in which some vulgar people delight.

From that very time I never could hear my cousin Oliffe's name spoken without hot cheeks, which betrayed myself to my godmother, who, alas, unworthy as it may seem, was always determined to rally me on the subject. However, a long interval was destined to pass before I saw my cousin again.

When I had dried my eyes, I heard a tap at the door, and Tugwell came in with two packets in her hand. One was a letter from home; the other a jeweller's parcel.

Tugwell said I had stayed too long in the cold,

and that I was shivering. She insisted on my coming into her little room, where she carried on a variety of business in the service of her lady.

Two "fronts" were upon the blocks; waiting to be dressed the next day. Fine lace, and muslin lay on boards for crimping, and there were various pots of scented pomade, and powder, of which my godmother made free use.

A bright little fire was burning, and Tugwell drew a chair near, and bid me sit down and open my packets.

She lighted a candle in a massive candlestick, and sat down with her usual air of patient endurance, to unpick the frilling of a cap which had not pleased Lady Sackville, and left me to read my letter in peace.

It was from my mother; and there were enclosures from Judith and Primrose.

We were not addicted to many expressions of endearments, like Miss Burney, but they all breathed of home and the old quiet life, and they all seemed to show that my absence made a blank, and that my mother especially looked forward to my return. She said she had read the history of our stoppage by highwaymen with anxiety as to the future; and that she had thought so much about it that a sleepless night had followed, and Mr. Vidal had to be summoned early the next morning.

She was glad, however, that I had been kindly received at Allingham Park; and begged her respects to Lady Allingham, and compliments to the young lord.

His name called up my late vexation; and I exclaimed aloud, "The young lord indeed!"

"He left that package, Miss Allingham," Tugwell said; "you have not opened it."

I tore away the wrapper, and came to a red morocco case on which was the name of a London jeweller. I touched a spring, and there lay a pretty ornament indeed, sparkling in the light.

"A true lover's knot!" Tugwell exclaimed, "and turquoise and diamonds! Well, that *is* a birthday present!"

It was too beautiful for the eyes of sixteen to be insensible to its attraction.

"This little slip of paper fell out from the last wrapper," Tugwell said, as she picked it from the floor. "Here, read what is written on it."

"For my cousin Althea, with greetings on her natal day, from Allingham."

I looked at the true lover's knot for a moment, then shut the case, and sat with my elbows on my knees, gazing into the fire.

"You will show it to her ladyship?" Tugwell said.

"No, I shall not," I answered; and then I went to my room, pushed the case into a drawer in my bureau, and went down again to tea in the parlour.

The next few weeks were a blank. I seemed for two days to be oppressed with a deadly stupor, and I was put to bed on the third, with the fever then so prevalent.

Whether I caught it of my cousin I do not know; it was raging in the lower parts by Eton, and indeed many members of the household at the Castle and the Queen's Lodge were stricken.

I was blistered and bled, till there was but little life left in me; and as I look back upon the medical

treatment of those days, I wonder—not that many folks died—but that any lived to recover from illnesses like mine.

CHAPTER VI.
BY THE SUN-DIAL.

"How long have I been ill?" My voice sounded as if it came from a long way off, and then a gentle movement behind the curtain was heard, and a sweet pale face appeared to me as if in a vision.

I had seen it often when I was lying in the dream-land of half-consciousness, and yet I had never found strength to ask a question till now.

"My dear child, you have been very ill; but thank God you are better."

I was still so weak I could scarcely lift my hand to my head; and I gazed wonderingly at my nurse.

"Are you Aunt Norah—Lady Allingham?"

"Yes; I must not let you talk till you have had your physic."

Then she held a glass to my lips, and I said:

"Tell me about it. It's like a dream."

Not all at once, but by degrees, I learned from my kind nurse that just as she was herself recovering from this fever, she heard from Oliffe, who rode over every day to make inquiries for me, that I had been left alone at the Croft with two servants.

Lady Sackville had been terrified as to infection, and had fled fear-stricken to London, to a house in Cavendish Square; taking with her her coach and her servants, Cracknell, as frightened as her mistress, and

of course poor Tugwell. So I had been left alone to die, if so it fell out, with no one but a housemaid and an old crone of a nurse, who was hired to attend me.

As soon as Lady Allingham was strong enough she had come to take care of me. She had dismissed the old woman and her gin-bottle, and one of the servants from the Park had helped her to nurse me. And how lovingly she did nurse me!

I look back over the long waste of years to that time as the time of awakening.

Aunt Norah's voice in prayer, in reading of the psalms and lessons, her gentleness and her goodness, won my heart. I, too, longed to walk in the way which she had found, the way of peace.

Delivered from the bands of death, I seemed to step out in a new life—a life which I had never, never known before. Many and deep trials were to be my portion; but I think I may say, now that the evening shadows are gathering, and my call to rest cannot be far distant, that from that time I had within me, the well-spring of peace, which the storms of life had no power to destroy.

I was conveyed in a closed landau to Allingham Park one fair February. The Croft was to undergo a long stage of cleaning and purifying ere my godmother would dare to re-enter it; and as soon as I was pronounced fit for the short journey my aunt arranged for my removal.

The first sweet days of early spring always bring back to my mind those happy weeks passed by me in the home of my ancestors. Renewed youth and life are so sweet! I did not look forward—I did not care to do so.

My bed-chamber window looked over the little copse below the broad terrace walk, along which I had gone on that autumn morning, and had made my first acquaintance with my cousin Oliffe.

The sun shone through the yet leafless branches, and made a lovely mosaic of light and shade upon the ground.

Beyond there was a group of noble horse-chestnuts, the brown buds glistening in the light; and in the distance through the bare trees the great pile of Windsor Castle stood up in all its majesty.

Mrs. Bean had taken entire charge of me; and on a bright morning in March she came to me with the news that there were two letters for me, and that my lord had come back from Oxford. He had arrived the night before, after the gates were locked; and there had been a scene between him and Mr. Baldwin; and, said Mrs. Bean, "there will be many more before we have done."

Bean dressed me, and then said she would take me to the dairy for my draught of new milk, for the morning was as soft and warm as midsummer. She left me for a few minutes to read my accustomed portion, and say my prayers, and to read my letters.

Two letters! a very unusual event for me. I opened Judith's first. It was to tell me that she and Primrose had been confirmed, and that Geoffrey and George Broughton had also been presented to the Bishop.

She described her dress, and said that Pring had heard that the Bishop inquired *who* the two sisters with the distinguished air could be!

Mary Vidal had also been confirmed; and they were all to receive the Sacrament on the next Easter Day.

Judith treated the whole matter as a very ordinary affair; and went on to say, that now she and Primrose were old enough to come out into the world, she wished some old godmother like Lady Sackville would turn up for them. It was monstrous, Judith said, that they should be doomed to that humdrum life for years. Could I not ask for an invitation to Allingham Park?

Then she said mother grew more of an invalid, and that Mr. Vidal thought the anxious time she had passed waiting for tidings when I was ill had produced a marked effect on her. She was much worse, in fact, than she had ever been.

Enclosed was a little note from Mary Vidal, calling me her dearest Miss Althea, and wishing I was at home again.

Her postscript filled me with alarm:

"Dearest Miss Althea, I am sure father thinks Mrs. Allingham much more ill."

This letter was not likely to raise my spirits. Neither was the next I opened—written on gilt-edged paper, and sealed with an enormous seal; franked by some great person in large sprawling letters, which I could not read. It was a curious document; I have it still:

"GODCHILD ALTHEA,

"I hope and pray you are in good health again. A deal of money has gone out of my pocket to repair the ravages of fever in the Croft.

"I dared not re-enter it till all was secure. I do not return thither till midsummer. I find the town vastly amusing. As my Lady Allingham has been so obliging as to take you to the Park, make my com-

pliments, and beg her to keep you till you are pronounced convalescent.

"As soon as that comes about I will receive you here, and take you to routs and loo-parties; but I pause till I feel you are not a dangerous person!"

"How goes it with my lord? though I suppose he has been banished from his charmer.

"Tugwell is such a poor creature, and has indited this letter villainously. My hands are too painful to hold the quill myself. I am in good company with the gout, for Mr. Walpole has been groaning under it.

"Your affectionate godmother,

(Signed) "ALTHEA SACKVILLE.

"Post Scriptum.—I beg you order all your clothes which came near the fever to be burned. I vow I should die of fear if the fever seized me!"

I had but just read these letters, and shuddered at the selfishness of the last production, when Bean called me to go to the dairy.

Who should I find there but my lord, my cousin Oliffe! He poured out my foaming draught and made me eat junket also, with a crisp roll. Then he gazed anxiously into my face, saying:

"What! all the roses gone? Nothing but eyes left, little cousin?" And he added, *sotto voce*, "What eyes!"

Then he turned laughingly to Mrs. Bean, and said:

"Let me take her a turn, Beanie; she shall not catch cold. Do, Beanie, for I want a soothing influence to-day."

I saw the rosy dairymaid smile significantly; and then my lord tucked my hand under his arm, and drew me away.

"Not to the river, it might be chill," he said; "but into the old garden, which was laid out by my great-grandmother in Queen Anne's time."

So we turned into the pleasaunce—that old name suits it best. The red brick walls were covered with fruit trees, all putting forth their delicate pink and white buds. In the beds, with deep box-edging, wall-flowers and marjoram made the air sweet. Spring flowers raised their heads like jewels in the dark setting of the box borders. Some tulips of value, straight from Holland, were coming into bloom; and the first butterflies of the year danced in airy couples; while early bees hummed in the wallflowers, and seemed full of busy toil, and pleasure in that toil.

In the middle of the pleasaunce was a fountain; and gold-fish were darting hither and thither, or lying motionless in the still depths of the old stone basin, undisturbed by any motion, for the fountain was not at play.

A sun-dial, with the old familiar motto of "Tempus fugit," was raised on a moss-grown pedestal, on a square of brick, and here Oliffe stopped.

"Well, Althea," he began, and then he paused. Somehow silence seemed to suit us best. Presently he went on: "You have been given back from the gates of the grave, Althea. May I say to *me*—to *me* first of all?"

I felt a great trembling seize me, and would have drawn my hand away had I not feared to fall.

"You must understand me, Althea. I would die

at your feet sooner than lose the hope that you would look favourably on me."

Oh, much more he said; I need not write it here. I let him put his strong arm round me, and I, leaning on his shoulder, could scarce believe that I had so suddenly passed from childhood to womanhood, as so lately from the shadow of death to life.

Oliffe poured forth much from his full heart. He had returned from Oxford to be met by cold disapproval from his guardian. He had literally done nothing at the University—he owned it—but spend money. How few in those days did much besides! Few, I say, by comparison, though I well know there were honourable exceptions.

I do not think, as I stood there listening to Oliffe's words, that any thought moved me but the thought that by the influence of my love he would begin in earnest to prepare for life, and all that his position required of him. I do not think that in the first moving of the waters I felt aught but the mere fact that an angel had stirred them, and that henceforth there was for me *one* love, and that the greatness of that love encompassed me.

I was very young, and very ignorant of the world and its ways; and as Oliffe repeated again and again that he would love me and cherish me for ever and ever, I could not speak, but I raised my face to his, and he sealed my unspoken consent with a kiss.

Almost as he did so a shadow fell across the sunny surface of the plot of turf on which the dial stood.

We started apart; and there was Mr. Baldwin! "A fine morning," he said, in an ordinary voice

—that hard, cold voice which I knew well by this time.

I was hastening away with tottering steps, for I was yet very weak, when Mr. Baldwin said to Oliffe, who was following me:

"I want a few words with you, Lord Allingham, which this child had better hear."

"We had our few words last night," Oliffe said haughtily. "A few words too many, so it seemed to me. Spare me a repetition, sir."

"Miss Althea," Mr. Baldwin said, approaching me, "I wish to make you acquainted with the true character of the boy who has, if I may judge by appearances, taken this shameful advantage of your extreme youth and inexperience. He is wholly incapable of managing his own concerns. He is under my authority till he attains the age of twenty-five. He has contracted debts; he has——"

"Stop, sir!" said Oliffe, again taking my hand. "Stop, sir! I defy you to go on! I am Lord Allingham, and I shall please myself without consulting you, in this as in every other matter."

"You speak like the hot-headed *boy* you are!" A strong emphasis was laid on "boy." "I can refuse you any allowance; I have absolute control."

"Nay, I deny it. Lady Allingham, my father's widow, is my guardian also; and *she* will be no party to your iniquitous schemes."

If only Mr. Baldwin had shewed any heat, or any sign of anger! It was simply cool contempt.

I clung to Oliffe's arm; and said, as he was bursting forth again in a storm of indignant remonstrance:

"Come away: let us go to Aunt Norah."

"Yes, you are right, my sweet one," he said. "We will leave this gentleman to say what he has yet to say to the old sun-dial. It will not be less insensible to his tirade than I am. And so, Lord Allingham will wish him good-morning."

I turned to look at Mr. Baldwin. A smile was on his pale face, his thin lips parted; and in clear, distinct tones he said:

"Before you take so lofty an air, my boy, you had better make sure of your position, and be certain that you *are Lord Allingham*."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE TOWN.

THUS the shadows fell on my bright spring morning, and for the next few days I was miserable. I do not for a moment desire to speak lightly of the sorrows of youth, and say, as I know some old women do affirm, that these troubles, which are like clouds in the sky of love and youth, are merely transitory and leave no mark behind. They are painful enough at the time, and far be it from me to say they leave no trace as they come and go.

I well remember that I believed myself to be wretched beyond all precedent during the next few days.

Olliffe continually sought me, and begged me to pledge myself to him, to give him the right to set his guardian and the world at defiance, and say openly I would be his wife.

He represented to me his solitude in that old home, and the absolute need of companionship. He drew a picture of his gouty, reserved father—and himself a small motherless boy, uncared for till his stepmother came and brightened his life.

Then he spoke of his Eton life, when he had studied but little, and made friends with the sons of the wealthy nobility, whose expenditure was beyond his mark. How Mr. Baldwin's chilling reception prevented any of his old school-fellows, from coming twice to Allingham; how, if he paid visits to them, he was so scantily furnished with money, that the pleasure of mixing with those of his own rank was destroyed.

All this and a great deal more Oliffe said, sometimes breaking into fierce denunciation of Mr. Baldwin; sometimes bewailing his condition; sometimes threatening that if I would not consent to pledge my faith to him, he would go beyond seas, and be no more seen or heard of.

After some days, during which scenes with Oliffe alternated with quiet talks with Lady Allingham, who strengthened my resolution and made me brave, I was walking alone in the grounds, when I came suddenly on Mr. Baldwin. I would have turned and fled, but he was too quick for me.

"I am fortunate to meet you, Miss Allingham," he said; "for I wish a few moments' conversation."

"Pray, sir," I exclaimed, "let me pass; I am in haste to return to the house."

"We will walk back together," Mr. Baldwin said. "Nay, do not look so coldly on me, my fair young lady!" and he took one hand, and pressed his lips on

it; I wrenched it away, and summoning all my courage, I said:

"I have no mind, sir, to enter into conversation with you. My aunt, Lady Allingham, has communicated your wishes, and for the present I bow to her judgment."

"How well spoken! How prettily put!" was the provoked rejoinder; "and, seriously, I can excuse that head-strong boy for his madness, though I desire to deliver you from his power."

"I will not hear you speak thus of my cousin, sir. I will thank you to remember I, a weak girl, can make no resistance, or——"

My voice nearly failed me.

"No, that is true," was the rejoinder in the same cold collected voice. "No, that is true; but resistance must be made for you; and I will confide in you and tell you a secret."

"I will not hear it," I said. "I hate a secret; and I am certain you can have nothing to tell me."

Mr. Baldwin smiled.

"Permit me to ask you, fair lady, if you are conversant with the family history?"

"I know *you* are not in the history," I said. "I know——"

"That my sister was the old lord's first wife, and that I therefore am not connected with this noble house by the ties of blood. True; but did it never occur to you that I may have a nephew?"

"You may have a hundred nephews, for aught I care, sir!" I said.

Mr. Baldwin was now intercepting my path. I was weak from recent illness, and I was very young.

I tried to choke back my tears, but they were fast rising, when suddenly Mr. Baldwin bent his head low to my ear, and whispered:

"What if, instead of a hundred nephews, I have one, who is—"

Then there was a quick sharp rustle amongst the shrubs, and in another moment Oliffe had sprung out from the belt of copse, and seizing Mr. Baldwin by the large velvet collar of his surtout, he shook him fiercely, saying:

"You scoundrel! to dare to intercept this lady's path!"

Mr. Baldwin grew white even to the lips; but his wonderful self-possession, which always gave him the advantage over Oliffe, did not forsake him.

"You foolish boy!" he said, shaking himself free. "You foolish boy! Make the best of your reign and of your fancied importance, for they are short-lived!"

I waited to hear no more. I ran to the house, and going to my aunt's room, I threw myself on her neck and detailed the scene I had just witnessed. My aunt looked grave, and I forestalled what was evidently in her mind.

"I must go away from Allingham; I cannot endure it! I cause anger and trouble; let me go!"

Accordingly Lady Sackville was assured of my perfect recovery; and a proposal was made that I should join her in her town house, as she still feared to inhabit the Croft.

Many and varied were the restrictions put upon my return; and when poor Tugwell came to escort me to town, she brought two large bags of camphor

one of which I was to hang round my neck, and another to put in my pocket.

Tugwell arrived in a hackney-chaise one afternoon, and we started early the next morning. Post-horses were changed once on the way, and the journey was well accomplished in four hours.

My aunt, Lady Allingham, had kept back her intention from Oliffe, saying wisely it was useless to stir up strife; and it was not till the arrival of the hackney-coach had been announced that Oliffe understood what our intentions were. He did not take it as Lady Allingham and I had feared. A quiet determination had replaced his heat and anger.

Perhaps no sweeter words were ever spoken to me than those with which our parting interview closed.

"Sweetheart, I will strive to prove worthier of you; and henceforth I will lay aside empty boasts, and *prove* what I can do to win you. Do you believe me?"

Yes, I believed him; how could I doubt?

Life in town now began for me in good earnest. I was in favour with my godmother, in proportion as I was in favour with those whom she considered it an honour to know.

One evening we were at a rout, where a great many notables were present. It was, I remember, not very entertaining for me, as I was left in a corner behind a lounge, while my godmother took what she called her valuation of the company.

She studiously avoided those whom she did not consider worthy of cultivation, and was at least, so I thought, too desirous to please others.

The entrance of a gentleman from an ante-cham-

ber, where the loo-tables were placed, made a commotion. Everyone began to smile and flirt their fans, and try to attract attention.

A lady near my corner whispered:

"Now let us watch Mr. Walpole and the two blue-stockings. Ah! Miss Burney carries the palm."

The gentleman who had caused this agitation was slight in figure, but not very tall. His eyes shone like stars, and his thin lips smiled blandly as he advanced up the long withdrawing-room, chatting gaily to Miss Burney, who was at her liveliest and her best.

Mr. Walpole had a very strange gait, and walked as if on hot coals; his knees bent, and his "chapeau bas" pressed tight under his arm. He wore a lavender suit, and a waistcoat much embroidered in silver. His stockings fitted his thin legs beautifully, and he had lace ruffles and frills.

He had a very low soft voice, and to my amazement he suddenly stopped and handed Miss Burney to a seat near me. Then he crossed the room to a table by which a handsome lady stood with powdered hair, and taking her hand, led her back to the place where Miss Burney sat, and seating himself between them, said:

"Now well may I tremble, as I am placed between Minerva and Venus. And pray, which of you answers to the last named?"

"Nay, kind sir," said Miss Burney; "you must answer that question, and be sure we will abide by your decision."

Then from my secluded corner, half hidden by a curtain, I listened to an exchange of wit, and badinage, such as I had never heard before.

The two ladies on either side of Mr. Walpole, seemed to be the object of notice and envy to a group opposite, who whispered to each other, and flirted their fans, and made the most of two or three elderly beaux, who tapped their gold snuff-boxes and played with their "chapeaux bas," after the fashion of the time.

My godmother had gone to the *loo-tables*, and I could not escape from my corner without passing between the end of the lounge and the edge of a cabinet where a good deal of china was displayed on shelves.

If I squeezed through, I thought some of the cups raised in pyramids might topple over. Thus there was nothing left for me but to remain where I was.

Mr. Walpole playfully called the lady with the powdered hair, and keen but beautiful eyes, "Madam Hannah." Thus I knew it was Mrs. More. He rallied her on her desertion of old friends, and told her she was not cut in the pattern of a Methodist.

Mrs. More answered with a sweet smile, that she did not wish to be cut in any pattern in particular—"Not even after Minerva," was the rejoinder.

At length my godmother's large figure was seen coming out of the inner room; her brow was dark, and she was resolutely snapping the steel clasp of her purse. Her loud voice reached us in our corner:

"No luck to-night, and I'll play no more."

"My Lady Sackville looks ill-pleased," Mr. Walpole said; "she plays high, and oftener wins than loses. But the flavour of *loo* is a little spoiled for me since poor Kitty Clive and Lady Ossory departed. Poor Kitty! I miss her sadly; she was a near neighbour, and Cliveden looks forlorn when unoccupied. A penny for my bright thought, Mrs. Hannah!—give up your

Cowslip Green and your poor folk there, and come to Cliveden and cheer my old age."

"With loo! ah no, sir! You would find me but a dull neighbour at Cliveden—and I would fain hope you have done with loo."

"A vain hope! Not that I would play often with yonder large lady, whom I think a vastly good representation of Britannia. By-the-bye, fair Evelina Cecilia, you must have intimate acquaintance with Lady Sackville."

"Nay, not intimate, sir; she is scarce the *bon ton*, though there is a certain rough good-nature about her. She has deserted the Croft for some time; scared by a fever her little godchild sickened with. The child was carried off by relations, the Allinghams of Allingham Park."

"Indeed! there is a mystery in that house, so I've heard."

"Another Castle of Otranto!" exclaimed Miss Burney. "Oh, do let us hear it!"

There was nothing Mr. Walpole loved better than gossip, especially when that gossip concerned the upper classes.

He rose to the occasion at once, and I heard the story of my uncle Allingham's three wives related—of the disappearance of the first, years before, and of the rumour that she had a son who might come to light from distant and foreign parts at any moment, and upset the claims of the "young spark" who had, so Mr. Walpole heard, got into mischief at Eton, and would to a dead certainty get into worse at Oxford.

"He has a guardian who looks after his own interests, so they say; and there are eternal squabbles

between them. It will be a strange story if an heir turns up, and my young gentleman is cast on the world! Allingham Park is a fine place, but has been going down, like many another fine place, till it will soon be fine no longer."

And now, when I was longing to get away, and disliking to be an eavesdropper any longer, I touched Miss Burney gentle on the shoulder, and begged to be allowed to pass.

"Oh, you dear little creature! so you have been hidden there all this time. Come out, and let me present you to Mr. Walpole. See, sir, here is Miss Althea Allingham."

"Ah!" Mr. Walpole said, rising, and making me a profound bow; "I am proud to make her acquaintance."

"Isn't she charming?" Miss Burney exclaimed. "I declare the fever has had such a good effect, that I vow I must catch one as soon as possible. Why, you are now quite a young lady, my sweet child! How delighted Mrs. Delany will be! Come, sit on the arm of the lounge, and let us have a talk. Mrs. More is looking gravely at us! 'Hers is the front of Pallas!' Ah! you don't know what that means."

Mr. Walpole, who had reseated himself, now said: "We are not all so learned in classical lore as Miss Burney, or Mrs. More; but at least, Miss Althea, let me beg you to take note, on the authority of an old man, that about these ladies it may be said:

"That all that they admire is sweet,
And all is sense that they repeat."

Mrs. More smiled on me, and said: "You must always learn to deduct somewhat from the good opinion Mr. Walpole was so kind as to express about his friends."

My godmother now bore down on us from the opposite side of the room, like a huge ship in full sail. She had forgotten her losses at too, and was evidently well pleased to see me in good company.

She curtseyed as low as circumstances permitted to Mr. Walpole, who again rose and made a profound obeisance, but he did not reseat himself this time, and I saw that he was desirous of moving away. But Miss Burney detained him, and said:

"You bid me as a guest to Strawberry Hill with my father, sir, and I could not avail myself of your invitation. Will you please to renew it, and let me bring 'la charmante petite' along with me?"

Mr. Walpole looked a little taken back; he was a great man in society, and he resented anything like forgetfulness of his position. But Miss Burney looked so bewitching, and declared she was "dying to come," that the invitation was given.

Mrs. More had been speaking to my godmother, and had not caught the drift of Miss Burney's remarks.

"It is all settled!" she exclaimed, "and I am sure my Lady Sackville will permit me to take as my *compagnon de voyage* my sweetest little Althea; we have arranged for next Wednesday. And you will come also, Mrs. More; you must come to Strawberry Hill, which Mr. Walpole says is the first cousin to Cowslip Green."

But Mrs. More shook her head. Wednesday was an engaged day, and she could not accompany us. But she was pleased to hear I was to be of the party.

My godmother had to hide her vexation that she was not bidden to Strawberry Hill; but she had at the

same time a feeling of reflected glory in knowing that I was considered a worthy guest in that now celebrated retreat.

We were conveyed to and from these routs in Sedan-chairs. Need I describe them? I believe they still exist, and are in use in some remoter parts of England.

They were all but universal in London at the close of the last century. My godmother had her own chair, and she was carried by her servants. Two men bearing torches walked by the side, and I was borne in a hired chair behind my godmother. The motion was a very swinging motion, and I used to feel giddy and sick if I was condemned to it for a long distance.

When I was deposited in the hall of my godmother's house that night, I heard her voice raised in loud tones, scolding Tugwell. I knew by this that her mood was not a serene one; and therefore I made my curtsey immediately, and retired for the night.

I sat down to ruminate before my mirror, as girls used to do when I was young, and do so nowadays, I doubt not.

My cousin was continually present in my thoughts. How could it be otherwise? I was not sure of my own heart. Although I do think girls of sixteen were in advance of girls of the same age in these days, I had scarcely realized *love* in the common acceptation of the term. Oliffe was no doubt a hero of romance to my young heart. Our first meeting on the road, when we were in peril of our lives; our second meeting by the stream, and our later intercourse, all went to foster a feeling of tenderness within me. Then I meditated on Mr. Baldwin's mysterious hints, and wondered if

indeed it were true that my cousin Oliffe's right to be Lord Allingham was doubtful. And if he were *not* Lord Allingham, what would it matter to me? he would still be Oliffe; and the title and the position were mere accidents. I was not old enough, or sufficiently well versed in the ways of the world, to value either too highly.

I had become more independent of assistance at my toilette, but I had not yet reached the point of taking down my hair from its high cushion, nor of lacing or unlacing my bodice.

I always waited for Tugwell, or a little maid who was training under her; and I was getting rather tired and sleepy when Tugwell's tap was heard, and she came in, looking the picture of weariness and sadness.

"Here," she said, "is a packet which was left for you while you were out this evening. My Lord Allingham brought it himself. My lady has raved at me because I did not bid him stay till your return. She is enough to wear out the patience of a hundred Jobs."

"Poor Tugwell!" I said; "I wish I could help you!"

"Help me, my dear! There's no help for a slave till the chains are knocked off; and mine are too firm for me ever to be free. Oh, it's a weary, weary world!" and poor Tugwell sank down on a chair and sighed heavily.

"Sit and rest, while I open my packet," I said.

"My lady has set her heart on your marriage with young Lord Allingham; and he is *your* slave—that's pretty easy to see. How his face fell when he heard you were gone to the rout at Mrs. Vesey's to-night!"

I broke the seal, and found a few words from Oliffe. How old-fashioned now is the form of address! and how florid the expressions of regard for poor little me!

But the great interest for me lay in a franked packet which had arrived from Abbotsholme. It contained letters from Judith and Mary Vidal. The first mentioned incidentally that our mother was more weak and ailing, and the last was written evidently to prepare me for worse news. Mary wrote:

"My father called in the doctor from Bath, and he considers Mrs. Allingham very ill. Dearest Miss Althea, I am sure you would like to know it. Miss Allingham does not think much about it; and Miss Primrose is so full of *other* things. I do not dare to tell you *what* things; but this I know, I wish you were at home."

"I must go home!" I exclaimed; "of course I must go home."

Tugwell shook her head.

"Her ladyship will never allow it; and how could you take that long journey alone?"

"But I *must* go, or I may never see my mother again. Oh, dear Tugwell, help me! There is a stage to Bath, and then—— Oh, Tugwell, I *must* go!"

Poor Tugwell rose, and began to take down my hair and undress me.

"My dear," she said, "there is no *must* for us who are bound to my lady. Her will is law—and she has been very good to *you*."

"She is a tyrant!" I cried. "I will break my chains, if *you* can't!"

Tugwell only shook her head. And, indeed, the

next morning when I begged to know whether I might return home to Abbotsholme, Lady Sackville only laughed.

"Home, child? This is your home," she said, "till you move to Allingham Park. Now don't let us have any nonsense. I can't abide scenes; and only babies cry. Tut! tut! do you think you will get over me like that? Go to your chamber and bathe your eyes, or my lord will be coming to see you in that sorry plight."

"As if I cared!" I said. "And if you will not give me permission to go home, I will go without it!"

Lady Sackville only laughed in a provoking fashion, stirred her chocolate, and turned her attention to Tugwell, who was scolded for having put too many lumps of sugar in the cup. Two lumps was the required number; and Tugwell had to admit she put three, because one was very small!

A long tirade followed, and I and my troubles were forgotten.

We saw no more of Oliffe. He did not come, as Lady Sackville expected; and it was with a heavy heart I prepared for my visit to Strawberry Hill the next day. A memorable day to me!

Dr. Burney and Miss Burney arrived early in a coach; and, to my amazement, when the coach drew up, a light figure jumped out, and my cousin, Lord Allingham, was ready to hand me in.

Miss Burney evidently enjoyed my surprise, and bid me remember that Mr. Walpole, who was the most fastidious of men, had sent a man post haste to summon my lord to Strawberry Hill.

Oliffe was very kind and thoughtful. I told him

of my anxiety, and how I was bound a prisoner by my godmother.

"I want to go home to see them all," I faltered.

"If you wish it, you shall go," my cousin said decidedly.

Miss Burney rallied me on my grave looks; but when my cousin told her my mother was ill, and that I wanted to see her, her kind little heart was evidently overflowing with sympathy.

None who knew her, could accuse Fanny Burney of want of heart; though some may think she overdid her expressions of tenderness for Mrs. Delany, and also overdid her flattery for her Majesty and the Princesses.

She was flustered a little when we drove up to Strawberry Hill.

We were conducted to the blue-room, overlooking the Thames, and found Mr. Walpole in morning costume. He wore no lace frills, only hemmed cambric; and his wig was not powdered, and combed straight, which showed his smooth white forehead.

At first I thought he was very stiff and punctilioius; for there was no warmth of welcome. He examined my cousin with a curious eye, and I fancied I saw that he was thinking of the gossip connected with Allingham Park.

He entered into conversation with Miss Burney, and begged to know whether we would examine his little place before or after dinner. We assured him we were quite indifferent, and would do as he deemed best.

Some light refreshment was then brought in—iced water, and Burgundy, and some delicious cakes.

Fortified by this repast, we began our examination of the rooms, and all the treasures they contained. As soon as Mr. Walpole began his office of cicerone, all his stiffness vanished. He talked gaily of his "paper fabric," and told Dr. Burney it was a Gothic Vatican of Greece and Rome. These treasures have often been enumerated, so that I need not describe them particularly here.

The library and refectory, or great parlour, were filled with antique pictures, painted glass, and other articles. Everything had a story attached to it; and Mr. Walpole's fund of anecdotes was surprising.

We dined in the large dining-room; and our fare was light and elegant. There was no excess of wine or rich food. Indeed, Mr. Walpole himself only drank iced water, which he recommended with a sly twinkle of his eye to Oliffe, saying:

"It is a cure for fevers, my lord; and I perceive you are just now stricken."

Miss Burney clapped her hands and said, *sotto voce*, to Mr. Walpole:

"The dear creatures do not understand the *double entendre!* They are but children."

Mr. Walpole, I think, pitied my confusion, for I knew Miss Burney was speaking of me; and yet, as she truly said, I did not fully take in what was meant.

After dinner coffee was served; and then the exploration of the house was continued; but Oliffe and I wandered out in the pleasure-grounds, and watched the stately barges pass to and fro; and beyond there was the lovely prospect of Richmond Hill and Ham Fields.

It was a peaceful afternoon, and there stole over me a sweet sense of rest. Oliffe cared for me—Oliffe would be my protector. And then he bent down and said:

"Little cousin, tell me you will be true to me."

It was not in me to refuse. Ah! in old age it is easy to recall the circumstances which have surrounded us in youth. It is easy for me to recall the garden at Strawberry Hill, the placid river, the emerald fields.

I can hear again the ripple of the water amidst the rushes, as Oliffe and I sat in a small summer-house with a thatched roof, and he told me again his tale of love.

Yes, all this I can recall; but it is hard to believe that little Althea Allingham, over whose head sixteen summers had but just passed, is one and the same with Althea Allingham whose hand is moving on these pages, as this record of her youth is inscribed upon them; and that sixty years separate her from that time! Sixty years; and how they have passed as a tale that is told! Sixteen or sixty—it seems to make but little difference when the whole are weighed in the balance. And in the near approach of the timeless life, the days and the years of our pilgrimage may well sink into insignificance.

Oliffe told me much of himself—his struggles with his hot temper; his struggles, too, with temptation to idleness and extravagance. He pictured to me the constant and irritating presence of his guardian; and he said that his father had been in subjection to him. He described his Eton life, and how again and again he had determined to begin afresh; and that

of late, under the influence of his stepmother, he *had* improved.

As to Mr. Baldwin's dark hint about an heir who would take precedence of him, neither he nor Lady Allingham believed there was the shadow of foundation for the notion he was trying to insinuate.

But whether or not, he had determined to do his utmost now to fit himself for a profession; and perhaps, he added, laughing his own merry laugh, die Lord Chancellor. That boyish merry laugh—I hear it now!

When we describe those we love, there is always a sore temptation to hide their faults; and when the great silence has fallen between us and them, any words that we use concerning them, for other ears, are naturally the words of praise. These are in my case needless.

As I unfold my story, it will be for those who read it to judge whether or not the great battle of life was fought well and bravely by my cousin Oliffe, Lord Allingham.

It was two days after our visit to Strawberry Hill that I found myself in a hackney-carriage with my aunt Norah, on my way to Abbotsholme once more.

Never can the kindness and consideration shown to me by my aunt, Lady Allingham, be forgotten.

Our journey occupied two days, and in the beautiful summer weather would have been pure enjoyment but for the weight at my heart. I suppose most people know by experience how the great events of life are dream-like as we pass through them; that there is a curious sense of unreality, or, I may say rather, a want of individuality, as we go through some strange experience, whether it be joyful or painful.

As the post-boy drew up the coach with a jerk at the door of my old home, the closed shutters told their tale.

I was too late! I never saw my mother again alive.

A solemn hush and stillness was in the familiar hall as I stood there, as a stranger might have stood, uncertain whether to advance or retreat.

My aunt put her arm round me as Bellamy, in a choked voice, answered her whispered question:

"Last night, about ten o'clock."

Then Pring came, with a white face, dimly seen in the shadows of the darkened hall; and even in her real sorrow, true to her traditions, she made a low curtsey to my aunt, and hoped she was not over-fatigued with the journey.

"Where are my sisters?" I asked.

"They are a-bed, my dear Miss Althea; they are quite overcome!"

Pring's voice faltered.

"Let me go to them," I said; "let me go to them." For I thought, as I spoke, their loss is my loss.

Then I disengaged myself from my aunt's arm, and stumbled upstairs. My sorrow was still dumb, I neither cried nor spoke. I turned the handle of the room occupied by my sister Judith, and found that she and Primrose were asleep in each other's arms. I could scarcely discern their features, but it was evident they were asleep. I stooped down and whispered: "Judith—Primrose."

Then Primrose started, and began to cry out in alarm:

"Who is it? Oh, I am so frightened!"

"It is only I—Althea. I have come home."

Then Primrose said:

"Hush! don't wake Judith. She is worse than I am; she is so afraid of—of——"

"Afraid of what?"

"Of death," Primrose whispered. "Oh, Althea, it is dreadful!"

Yes, it was dreadful to everyone in that darkened house, where scarce a ray of light was allowed to penetrate.

In those days death had many terrors. Everything connected with it was black and sombre; and the hope of immortality was buried beneath the pervading thought of the decay of all that was mortal.

Judith and Primrose were afraid to go about the house, and afraid to look upon the sweet still face by which the next morning I stood, with my hand in Lady Allingham's.

Presently she drew me down to kneel by her; and she prayed in her sweet, earnest voice, and repeated words which have ever since been a watch-word to me in other times of loss: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

I need not enter into many details of that week of darkness and dreariness.

The great, many-plumed hearse came into the narrow street, and the mutes in their long cloaks walked on either side of it, as it slowly moved away with all that was mortal of my gentle mother, to lay her by the side of my father in the vault of the Abbey Church.

Oliffe came, and walked as chief mourner.

My godmother, as my mother's nearest kins-

woman," sent her representative in a family lawyer who transacted her business, and, as I afterwards knew, made a fresh will for her every two or three months!

Etiquette prevented us girls from entering one of the high mourning-coaches which conveyed Oliffe and Mr. Vidal and Bellamy, and an old gentleman who had known my father, and the solicitor who had been our trustee when my father died.

Since my father's death, my dear mother had lived so quiet and retired a life that our expenditure had been much within our income. We three girls were therefore left with an independence which was magnified into a fortune, and which raised us still higher in the social scale at Abbotsholme.

It was the day after the funeral, when light was once more admitted to the house, that we were summoned to a consultation as to our future by my aunt Norah.

Judith desired a house in town, and to take her place as Miss Allingham. Primrose, on the contrary, was tearfully desirous to stay at Abbotsholme; and I had no very defined wishes.

Mr. Broughton had seen something of my aunt, Lady Allingham, during the week, and they had found much in common. I think from him she had learned much of our former life, and the seclusion in which we had been brought up.

Plans and counter-plans were discussed, and no decision was arrived at.

Oliffe seemed to have altered a great deal in the last few weeks, and although he told me he would ever remain determined to win me, he would press me no longer for a definite promise.

I was free as air, he said; and he would not tie me at sixteen to cast in my fortunes with one who had yet to prove he was worthy.

It was while everything was unsettled that Mr. Baldwin unexpectedly appeared. He said important business called him away out of England for, it might be, two years, and it might be longer.

He proposed to shut up Allingham Park, and to pay out of the estate one thousand a year to Lady Allingham, as her settlement required, and to purchase a commission in the army for Oliffe.

After much consideration and consultation with Mr. Broughton, both Mr. Baldwin's proposals were accepted; and it was further determined that Lady Allingham should take up her temporary abode with us; and that the household at Allingham Park should be reduced to the four trusted elder servants, who would keep the place in order till the return of the family.

Such arrangements were very common in those days. Now, I believe, it is quite usual for places like Allingham to be let with servants and furniture.

At the end of the last century such a plan would have been considered unworthy the dignity of a county family or a town magnate.

Thus I found myself before the close of this eventful year established with my sisters in the old home; and just as all strange things soon become familiar, it soon seemed a natural life to us all.

It was an untold benefit to us to have the companionship and guidance of our aunt Norah. Very gradually but surely her influence affected the whole household. My little friend Mary Vidal was welcomed

on terms of equality, much to Pring's surprise and to Mrs. Bonnor's amazement.

Our relations with the family at the Rectory became intimate and cordial. Mr. Broughton found aunt Norah willing to help him in his efforts for good, in and around Abbotsholme.

Those who read my story will, I dare say, hardly believe what an excitement was caused in Abbots-holme when my aunt Norah was seen in her plain black dress visiting the poor in their own homes—an unheard-of thing in Abbotsholme!

Then came the Sunday-school movement, which Robert Raikes had originated at Gloucester, and which many good people were trying to organize in other towns.

Contact with the poor had been considered almost dangerous. Fevers and all kinds of evils were supposed to result from crossing the threshold of the homes of the poor and destitute. Ah! we are apt to grumble at the condition of our country in these days, but I can, as an old woman whose race is well-nigh run, call on my countrymen and countrywomen to be thankful that, while much remains to be done, much has been done since the nineteenth century opened.

The condition of the gaol at Abbotsholme was like that of many other towns and cities, a standing disgrace to our country. The criminal was condemned to a prison where he not only infected others with his wickedness, but could scarcely fail, if he lived to complete his term of servitude, to come out of prison far worse in mind and morals than he entered it.

The great pioneer of prison reform, John Howard, had begun his work, but it was very long before the

rulers of our land saw that on them lay the responsibility of carrying it on. Health of body and plenty and cleanliness were for the upper classes, as we styled ourselves; the poor must be ailing, and must live as they could.

There was no help for it; and over-refinement and over-education were a mistake for the mechanic and the labourer; they would only tend to make them dangerous.

With the increase of population there must, of course, be an increase of effort; and men and women like Mr. Broughton and my aunt Norah were like St. Paul of old, when he saw the vision of the men who stretched forth hands for help. And seeing the needs of the poor as in a vision, they could say humbly, with the great Apostle, that they were "not disobedient to the heavenly vision."

I must not linger too long over this part of my life, or I shall grow tedious.

In Mary Vidal I found a true friend, and from her I learned much that I should never have heard of my dear mother's last days. Anxiety about me had certainly done her harm, Mary said. She had often reproached herself for allowing me to go away with my godmother; and when she heard of my dangerous illness she watched so eagerly for the arrival of the post, that she fell into a state of nervous excitement which hastened the end.

My gentle mother! who was blighted by the crushing sorrow which befell her before I was born, how often have I looked back on her sad life and thought how, if she could have known the great comfort of faith in God's *love*, it would have been so different for her!

But there was light at evening-time; and Mary Vidal told me her father said, after all her nervous fears and baseless dread that she was dying again and again, when the end did come, it was like a child falling asleep. Mr. Broughton was with her, and, as he prayed and commended her parting spirit to God, her smile was beautiful to see, and the sting of death was taken away.

With my sisters I had less rather than more intimate communion after the new order of things had been finally established.

Judith was continually looking forward to the expiration of the year of mourning, when she hoped to be recognised as Miss Allingham. Judith was proud in the possession of rank and beauty rather than vain.

She was undoubtedly a girl whom no one could see without noticing, and that she would make her mark in society—the London society of which I had had a peep—was, she believed, a certainty.

One day, soon after we had entered on our new life, Judith startled me by saying suddenly:

"Althea, why don't you marry Oliffe, and become Lady Allingham at once? It would be such a benefit for your poor elder sisters."

I replied that I was not even engaged to Oliffe, that we were bound by no promise, that he was not to come of age till he was twenty-five, and that in that time much might happen.

"Yes, you are right there," Judith said; "much may happen: his ardour may cool, and you may be left in the lurch. Depend upon it, Althea, you had better not let the bird in the hand slip for one in the bush. You know, Althea, you have none of the attrac-

tions which, pardon me, go for so much in the world. Lord Allingham, the young ensign in the Guards, will soon be courted and looked upon as a desirable scion of nobility. He will be marrying some heiress, and will have ten times the opportunity of so doing that he would have had as a noble student at Christ Church. Dear heart!" Judith exclaimed, "I wish I could be Lady Allingham; not that I covet the boy, exactly. Primrose has stolen the heart of George Broughton. He writes odes addressed to 'My fairest spring flower.' And to see them at church—Prim climbs the highest hassock, that she may bring her face above the pew-desk to catch his eye. I declare it is a little too bad, that both my sisters, one an hour younger and the other a year, should have lovers, while I——!"

I always disliked this kind of talk, but it never answered for me to attempt to differ from Judith.

"There is another thing, Althea," she continued; "it won't quite do for you to be so vastly intimate with Mary Vidal. When we visit in the county you will have to drop her, and then she will feel the fall terribly; it will hurt her, poor little thing! A surgeon's daughter can't be supposed to be on equal terms with us."

"I shall never drop my friends," I exclaimed; "so I shall never hurt them. I do wish, Judith, you were not so proud; even Oliffe said——"

Judith's eyes flashed fire.

"What did he dare to say? Go on, Althea; I insist upon it!"

"He said that he thought it was silly, and a little vulgar, to be so set up about family and title; especially for us——"

"Why especially for us, I pray you?"

"Our dear father was very good, and lived a sober and quiet life; but his father and Oliffe's father were very wild, and the goings on at Allingham Park were notorious for drinking and license."

"My dear little sister," Judith said, "you may have been to town, and you may have *seen* the world, but you know nothing of it; you are as ignorant as a baby. What you call license is accepted as befitting rank. Why, even Pring knows better! The Castle-Beamishes at Sorleigh Hall, keep open house; and in the shooting-season wine is poured out like water. Pring's brother was a valet there, and carried his master, Lord Castle-Beamish, up to bed six nights out of the seven. Who thinks the worse of him? *Not* royal personages; for his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, while on a visit there, was the tip-top of the revellers last autumn."

"I have heard," I said, "that the good King and Queen are greatly troubled by the conduct of the elder Princes. But however that may be, Judith, I hold to it that the higher one's rank, the better example we should set; and that there is nothing but *disgrace* attached to those who, because they have the means, run riot, and waste their time, and health, and existence in following evil courses."

I remember I grew excited and vehement, while Judith was cool, and deliberate, and contemptuous.

But some of her idle words left a little sting behind; and when Oliffe came at Christmas of that year, I think I had a feeling that the young ensign was further from me than the trout-fisher by the stream had been, or the cousin who had poured forth his love

for me in the previous spring-time by the old dial in Allingham Park.

Several letters came from my godmother; and as Oliffe's regiment was quartered at Windsor, she thought it was a vast pity I was not there.

"She seems to forget," I exclaimed, "that I should have no place in gay assemblies in my deep mourning, and no heart for them either."

"Ah, my child," aunt Norah said, "the lovers of the world who have no hope beyond, dislike to have the shortness of time forced upon them. They bury their dead out of their sight, and cheat themselves into the belief that they are to be exempt from the common lot of decay and death."

"And yet I fear," I said, "Lady Sackville may die suddenly at any moment. Tugwell says she often has fits of short breath, and rushing of blood to the head, which frighten her; and she continually has blood let from her arm."

"And yet she sees in these no signs of the approaching end. Alas! poor woman, we must pray for her," my aunt replied.

I think I never knew anyone so free from any *affectionation* of religious talk as my aunt Norah. When I was young, what was called "the serious world" had a way of dragging in set phrases, and quoting the words of Scripture continually.

This kind of mechanical religion had, and *has*, always a bad effect on those who are inclined to be indifferent or even contemptuous about these matters.

"The offence cometh" too often by the means of those whose many words—yes, even good words—are contradicted by their life! If my aunt Norah had been

one of these, how ready Judith would have been to detect the mote in her eye! But as with ourselves, so with our household of old servants—Pring, and Bellamy, and Mrs. Bonnor—we *saw* the reality of Christ's religion shown to us daily by gentleness and forbearance; by charity of word, as well as of deed; and by that beautiful courtesy which springs like a fair flower from a deeply hidden root!

BOOK II.

"He's truly valiant, that can wisely suffer."

"In the reproof of chance lies the true proof of men:
Even so doth valour's show, and valour's worth, divide,
In storms of fortune."

SHAKESPEARE.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MIRAGE FADES AWAY.

THE book in which I wrote a journal of events, and which was presented to me by my aunt Norah, is always by my side as I write this story of my life.

It would be tedious if I set down here all that lies recorded there; but as I turn the pages, I pause at the year 1789, and see a long, long hiatus before another word is written.

That blank page, where I dare not write, recalls to me a long season of dearth and barrenness—of darkness, as it proved, before the dawn; but though I see now, as I look back, how that very darkness threw out the bright light which was to follow it, I could not see it then.

We are sometimes brought, as it were, to a labyrinth where there seems no clue to guide our stumbling feet. Nay, we give up the attempt as hopeless, and folding our hands, sit down to bear the inevitable.

I cannot say what spell was upon my cousin Oliffe

nor how it was that my sister Judith *seemed* to steal his heart from me.

He came often to Abbotsholme, and every time he came, I began to feel the gulf between us was widening. Things were not as they had been. I became aware, also, that Geoffrey Broughton's attachment to me was considered patent to all observers. I saw, too, that Judith persisted in forcing it upon everyone's notice; and she would rally me about him in a manner which, in the presence of Oliffe, was positive pain.

Our year of mourning having expired, Judith set about in good earnest to fulfil her own desires; and it was easy enough for her, through the good offices of her handsome and distinguished cousin, to receive visits from the people in the neighbourhood; and when we returned them, we found ourselves accepted in what was called the best society.

The Castle-Beamishes were amongst these; and oh, if that were accounted the *best*, I may well ask, what was the worst? But they were folks highly thought of, with a fine place, and visited by royalty.

It was in the month of February, 1789, that a grand dinner and ball were announced at Sorleigh Hall, to celebrate the coming of age of the young Mr. Castle-Beamish.

The house was to be full of guests, and the Prince of Wales was to be there, with a following of gentlemen.

Since the King's sad and terrible illness, the Prince of Wales had assumed the right of directing the affairs of the nation. The Regency Bill was before the House, and he was looking to be actually made Regent.

But at this time, the spring of 1789, the King had shown decided signs of returning health; and Dr. John Willis reported from Kew that his Majesty was rapidly gaining ground, and might soon be pronounced *sound* in mind and body.

Our invitation to Sorleigh Hall was for the whole week, and caused the greatest satisfaction to my sisters. Nothing was talked of but dress and jewels, and Judith was in her element.

Of course, my cousin Oliffe was invited; and he came to Abbotsholme in January, to make arrangements with my aunt as to who should undertake to be our chaperon at Sorleigh.

Now I had again and again declared that I would not marry my cousin Oliffe till he was of age. I do not think we had referred to the subject of late. He had gradually begun to treat me more as his child-cousin than his betrothed wife. Not that he was neglectful of me, for he always behaved in a pleasant, brotherly fashion; but love is quick to notice a change—and a change there was.

My aunt Norah, I think, saw it; but she was always so careful of wounding a tender place. Judith and Primrose saw it; and Primrose even spoke to me about it, and said I ought to take Oliffe to task.

But if my faith was shaken, I did not acknowledge it to others, and scarcely to myself.

The old sitting-room, where my dear mother had been a prisoner for so many years, was lighted by the cheerful blaze of a wood-fire one afternoon late in January.

My sisters had just been parading before me and aunt Norah in the dresses they were to wear at the

great fête at Sorleigh Hall, and they had rallied me on my dulness and the little interest I took in the pleasures which they enjoyed so much. "Even Oliffe calls you a little brown mouse," Judith said; "and Pring says your dress is not in the least suitable for the grand doings at Sorleigh."

"Even Oliffe says"—the words fastened upon me as I sat in the deep window-seat, looking out upon the old elms; and the whispering poplars seemed to repeat, "*Even Oliffe says.*"

Thick, heavy curtains were drawn partially over the windows, and I was concealed from those in the room.

My two sisters had just closed the door, when it opened again, and I heard some one come in, and with a long-drawn yawn seat himself on the wide sofa with a heavy thud. I peeped from my hiding-place, and the light of the fire flickered upon my cousin Oliffe's face, which was not the face of a man at rest.

Presently the door again opened, and my aunt Norah came to her place by the fire; and Oliffe exclaimed:

"No news yet from uncle Baldwin—his two years have stretched into nearly three."

"It is very strange," my aunt said; "and I confess I am anxious about him."

"You don't want him back, surely, mother. As far as I am concerned, he may stay away; only it is queer about this estate. He said he had bought it for his ward; his ward, indeed! I don't care for a sugar plantation worked by niggers. He ought to have consulted you before he used my money in that way."

"Yes, that is true," my aunt said; "but I think your uncle is a man of business, and will not incur any risk. You will be of age in two years now, dear Oliffe; and then——"

"I shall be free," he said.

"Dear little Althea is very patient; how nobly she has behaved!"

Oliffe started up.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, "all that sort of thing is over between me and Althea. We have had no quarrel, dear little girl! But it is better to let what passed between us rest; besides——"

"Besides what?"

"I have good reason to know she likes some one better than me."

What was it that held me as if I were under a spell? I could neither move nor speak. My lips were parched and dry, and I could not make myself heard or seen.

"Yes, mother; and it is just as well," Oliffe went on, "for I dare say Judith is more suited to me. She is——" he stopped, for again there was an opening of the door, and Judith came in with a slow and stately step; and making a profound curtsey, said:

"I hope this costume pleases you, my lord."

She had changed her dress for one she was to wear the second night at Sorleigh, when there was to be a theatrical entertainment, and she was to appear as Olivia in "Twelfth Night."

My sister looked dazzlingly beautiful in a crimson taffety, looped up over a saffron petticoat. Her beautiful arms were bare to the shoulder, where the sleeves were caught back with brilliants. Her head-dress was

a velvet cap edged with pearls, from which hung a veil. The whole effect was startling.

Oliffe sprang to his feet, and taking Judith's hand, kissed it.

"I have been telling my mother," he said, "of the honour you will do me, fairest of fair cousins."

I fancied I heard my aunt Norah pronounce my name; and she did not respond to Oliffe's question, as he asked:

"Does she not look like a queen? Forsooth! a diadem would suit her better than a poor coronet."

As the two stood together in the firelight, while, as if to illuminate their figures, the flames suddenly leaped up the chimney, and shed a flash of radiance over my sister and Oliffe, I crept out of my hiding-place. At first as a guilty thing, frightened and ashamed; but as I advanced towards my aunt strength came to me—the strength which I asked for—"Teach me to do what pleases Thee."

"Aunt Norah," I said, "I have been sitting in the window-seat. I have heard all Oliffe said, and I ought to have come out sooner, but I could not summon courage. Forgive me, please, Oliffe. I am sure it is true, Judith will suit you far better than I could ever suit you; and it is all quite right and best, we were both quite free, you know. I was very young—only a child—when——"

My aunt put her arm round me, for my voice faltered.

"Sweet little Althea!" Oliffe began; "if we made a mistake, it is better to right it before it is too late. I hope you will be as happy with——"

I suppose something in my face struck him and

Judith, for they both involuntarily made a step forward, and Oliffe stretched out his arm as if to prevent me from falling forward.

But I rallied myself, and said firmly:

"It is quite best and right; only there is one mistake—one mistake," I said, gathering firmness. "There is no one else for me to be happy with, Cousin Oliffe."

And then, disengaging myself from my aunt's restraining hand, I rushed away—not to cry or moan. This was no time for tears—they came later, but not then—and I was only conscious of a cold, dead weight at my heart.

I went to my old room, and putting on my thick cloak and warm hood, I crossed the hall and asked Bellamy to bring a lanthorn and escort me to the Rectory.

The Rectory was a familiar place to me. I had become like a daughter in the house; and I had learned much there never to be forgotten.

Geoffrey was just completing his career at Cambridge. George was in a lawyer's office in Abbots-holme. The third of the three brothers was laid to rest in the old Priory churchyard. He had died during the first year of our return to the old home. At the gate of the Rectory a dark figure passed me, and a voice I knew well said:

"We thought you late, Miss Althea. I was coming to ask whether I might have the pleasure of escorting you here. Are you so full of the coming festivities at Sorleigh that you have no time for us?" Then, turning to Bellamy, Geoffrey said: "You need not return for Miss Allingham. I will bring her back."

In the hall Geoffrey unfastened my thick cloak; and as I untied my hood he looked inquiringly into my face.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

"No," I replied; "not in body."

"What is it? Can I help?"

That was always his first thought—"Can I help?" No, he could not help me—no one can help those whose idols lay prone upon their faces, perhaps never to rise again. I suppose the bitterness at my heart that night is well understood by those who, like myself, can only cry aloud that their love was like a fair castle built upon the sand. Nay, a mirage which had no substance—a vision of beauty which faded into thin air.

We met at the Rectory once a week for a lecture on the Scriptures, which Mr. Broughton gave to as many young people as would come.

My sisters never joined this meeting, because several daughters of tradespeople were of our number; and they were bound fast by the old traditions.

We always drank tea together first, and then we had an hour with Mrs. Broughton for needlework and conversation.

Mary Vidal was one of the most constant attendants, and she soon followed me into the hall.

Mary's love for me was just the same as in her childish days, and we always sat next each other at tea, and Mary helped me with my work if I were in any difficulty.

Mrs. Broughton had a wonderful gift for keeping up a bright conversation, without allowing us to degenerate into gossip.

We spoke of current events then engrossing the public mind. The Regency question, which the reported recovery of the good King was likely to set at rest; the stories of distress in France, and the miserable condition of the people there; the severe winter with which this year, 1789, opened; and the want of provisions, which was driving the poor people to despair. The King was weak, and the governors and rulers wicked as well as weak; and the great question of impending revolution made the hearts of all right-thinking English people, who had been so much engrossed with their own difficulties, heavy within them. As we talked and listened at the Rectory that evening I remember thinking how small were my concerns when weighed in the balance with such matters. Here was I, "the little brown mouse," as I heard Oliffe had called me, turning to ice by the freezing blast which had swept over me. Conscious that I had told myself for a long time that this change was at hand; and yet, now it was come, stunned and miserable.

For I found I loved Oliffe still—and now I had to set about forgetting that he had ever told me that I was all the world to him; for it was Judith, not me, who was to be Lady Allingham.

I think there is scarcely any painful experience through which we pass that is not mixed and confused. We feel as if we were in a maze, and at first scarcely struggle to be free, so desperate is the pain which the very struggle implies.

"I must bear it and hide the pain," was, I think, the prominent thought in my heart that evening. I looked round on the girls—Mary Vidal, with her sweet gentle face; the tender sympathy expressed there for

me, for I think my face must have told the tale to everyone. So many questions as to how I did were asked. There were the two rosy, good-tempered Miss Brookes, the daughters of the Abbotsholme draper, who were very smart in their bright-coloured skirts, and their flowered chintzes pulled through the pocket-holes on either side. They wore caps with cherry-coloured ribbons, and bows upon their aprons to match. They were not genteel, but they were thoroughly kind-hearted and two of Mrs. Broughton's best helpers in her work for the poor. Then there was a faded spinster lady, who talked in a low drawling voice. Mary Vidal had told me that Miss Price had been deserted by a lover, and that her life had been blighted in consequence.

Oh, I thought, is a future like Miss Price's before me? Shall I live to be fifty, and look like that poor wan discontented woman, with her thin curls made up into transparent bows, and an affectation of youth about her?

I too had been deserted, and I too might be a second Miss Price one day.

Then there was Miss Straight, our old governess, who was always pleased to be reminded of our school-room days, and to recall little incidents connected with them.

And there was Mrs. Goodwin, whose husband was the lawyer to whom George Broughton was apprenticed, and who edged herself away from the Miss Brookes and Mary Vidal, and always tried to administer doses of flattery to me, and to set up an intimacy.

When we had worked for an hour or more the

Rector would come in; the work was put away, and we brought out our Bibles, and he gave us a bright commentary on the part we had studied since our last meeting. I say "bright," for Mr. Broughton made everything bright and interesting. His Bible-classes were, to intelligent and thoughtful minds, a wonderful boon, especially in those far-off times when a mechanical religion prevailed.

On this particular evening I well remember my thoughts wandered, or rather were wholly concentrated on myself and my position; yet certain words suddenly arrested me, and I can hear them spoken even now.

St. Paul's words had come in the chapter we had read: "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." And the Rector said: "But try to endure with a cheerful grace; do not take the chastisement as a coward and flinch beneath the rod, and lie down and give up. Nay, endure with a brave front, as a good soldier should; and when the blow falls, ask to be helped to bear it as a Christian ought. And if you take the cross thus, you will find it grow lighter as you bear it; and if you lift your face to heaven as the crown of thorns is pressed on your brow, you will soon find that it has blossomed into flowers."

The Rector's "God bless you" to me that night was more fervent than usual, I thought; and I am sure Mrs. Broughton's kiss was more loving.

Geoffrey walked through the garden with me, bearing a lanthorn in his hand. When he came to the little door in the wall opposite our house, he put the lanthorn down and said:

"You are sure I cannot help you, Miss Althea?"
"Yes," I said; "quite sure."

"You will count me ever as a friend," he said. "I dare not ask for more; but you know well I long for more. You know it, Miss Althea."

"Oh!" I said, "do not say this to-night—not to-night. I have already had to bear so much."

"I will not say any more then; I shall go out to distant lands as soon as I take Holy Orders. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts has need of workers, and I am ready. When you are the lady of Allingham Park, then——"

"Stop!" I said; "oh, stop! that will never be."

He had opened the little door now, and I was across the street to our house in an instant. I waited on the top step till Bellamy had opened the door; Geoffrey stood below with the lanthorn in his hand. During the momentary delay he sprang up and saying, "Remember, I would serve you to my latest breath," he took my hand, and pressing it to his lips, was gone.

The great festivities at Sorleigh Hall came off in the following week. We three sisters went under the care of a lady in the neighbourhood, who was very much pleased to act as our chaperon. The house was crowded with guests, and a suite of rooms was set apart for the Prince of Wales and his attendants.

Two Miss Allinghams, at least, were the observed of all observers; and I soon found that the "little brown mouse" need not have concerned herself as to being overdone with attention.

I do not think such scenes as those enacted at Sorleigh Hall could be believed unless they were actually witnessed. The gentlemen sat over their wine every night, till they were mostly carried up by their

servants to bed in a condition of helpless drunkenness.

The Prince himself was so hardened by long habit that he was generally quite coherent, and even steady, long after the people who had drunk with him had dropped under the table. The festivities ended with a ball, and it was then that my sister Judith was singled out for especial notice by the Prince; he had followed her with his eyes during the theatricals, and had asked that she should dance the minuet in his party. Judith was proud and delighted, and the young ladies of the neighbourhood were filled with envy.

The Prince, who, as we all know, had the character of being the very acme of finished manners and deportment, did Judith the honour of leading her through the maze of a "sarabande"—a slow, almost solemn dance, where their grace of deportment was a spectacle for everyone to admire.

Mr. Castle-Beamish and Primrose were in the same set. I stood amongst the crowd of spectators to watch.

Presently I found my cousin Lord Allingham was next me. His eyes followed Judith with a strange expression, half sad, half admiring; and then he turned away with a sigh. The glass-house, as it was then called, was at a little distance from the house; but a covered way had been made from the French windows of the ballroom to connect it with the house. Lamps and candles were hung along it, and the flowers beyond made a vista of beauty.

"Shall we leave them to finish the sarabande, Althea," my cousin said, "and walk towards yonder flowers, where a fountain is sparkling like diamonds?

Scenes like this do not suit you, my little cousin. But I pray you think twice before you go forth as a missionary to Hottentots or Mulattoes."

"I am not going to be a missionary," I said, struggling to be calm. "I do not understand you."

"Ah, well," he said, "I will not press the point. You have made a better choice than if——" He stopped. "But, Althea, though I am borne along in this stream of fashion, and have to dance, and drink, and gamble with the rest, I would give something to be out of it all; and wish I were the same as when I stood by the old sun-dial with a little maiden who——"

"You must not speak thus to me, my lord; you are engaged to be married to my sister; and," I said, with a great effort, "it is best that it should be so, only——"

"Only what?" he asked.

"Do not say that you must drink, and game, and dance because others do it. There can be no *must*—no obligation."

"Ah, so you teach me, or would teach me, Althea. I had determined to make a steady resistance when I gave up the University life and took to soldiering; I determined to be—well, something different to *that*," he added, pointing, as he spoke, to the Prince and Judith, and Primrose and the heir of Sorleigh, who were coming jauntily towards us—the gentlemen bending down to my sisters and whispering words which, to judge by their faces and demeanour, were tender as well as flattering. "The couples are all thronging here now," my cousin said; and then, in answer to a summons from Lady Castle-Beamish, my cousin left me, saying he would return very soon and escort

me back to the ballroom, and bid me wait where I was.

I retreated behind a tall palm-tree, which hid me from observation; and again I could not help hearing the conversation of two people near me, who were reclining on a crimson-covered lounge near the spot where I stood.

"We shall see you at Court—our greatest ornament," the Prince was saying to Judith. "Methinks we shall have half the men about town dying of jealousy of Allingham."

Judith flirted her fan, and said composedly:

"Your Highness is very good to have such an opinion of me."

"*Good!*" I thought with a thrill of disgust.

"And your pretty sister," he continued, "will be so kind as to put up with yonder jacksonapes for the sake of these broad acres, and I do not blame her. And then there is the third in the galaxy of lovely sisters—what fate awaits her?"

"Oh, little Althea has different views, sir. She will soon be married to a sober youth who thinks dancing and merriment a sin. He is going out to teach black folks their letters."

"Nay, now," said the Prince, with a laugh, "I'll forbid the banns. Your sister would be reckoned a beauty if you did not cast her, and every other woman but *one*, into the shade. You must make acquaintance with that *one*, madam, and then—"

I could not stay any longer in my hiding-place, and be thus an unwilling listener to this conversation. I pushed aside the long leaves of the palm, and found myself obliged to pass down between the gentlemen

and ladies who were either strolling about, or seated on the benches to cool and rest.

I felt lonely and unprotected, and hastened back to the house. Supper was about to be served, and several of the royal gentlemen-in-waiting were inquiring for the Prince. As I stood, uncertain which way to turn, I saw my cousin engaged in what seemed very earnest conversation with our hostess.

I went up to her then, to ask leave to retire.

So deeply was Oliffe engrossed with her that he did not see me approach.

"Yes," he said, "it is an awkward predicament; but I hope such a rope of sand will not fail to break if they trust to it."

"You are engaged to your beautiful cousin," Lady Castle-Beamish said; "then the sooner you marry her the better."

What could this mean? Oliffe turned suddenly and saw me.

"Ah!" he said, "I left you behind the palm-tree waiting for me, little cousin. Lady Castle-Beamish was so good as to send for me to deliver a letter a special messenger has just brought from Abbotsholme. My most worthy uncle has turned up, as all bad pennies do turn up, and has signified the same to my mother; and——"

Oliffe's manner was hurried, and I saw Lady Castle-Beamish make him a sign to say no more.

Just as the long procession was passing into the banquet-room, I managed to elude observation and retire to my chamber.

A letter lay on my table, and I saw it was from my aunt Norah.

It enclosed a feebly written scrawl in characters which were scarcely legible, for the long tails of the letters were so many, and the stops and spaces between the sentences were so few.

The letter was from poor Tugwell, to tell me the bonds of her servitude were broken.

Death, the great liberator, had at last set her free, for Lady Sackville had died in a fit of apoplexy, and poor Tugwell was left alone.

It is strange that the selfish and tyrannical folks of this bewildering world are often mourned by the very people who have suffered from their hard yoke. So it was with poor Tugwell.

"I feel heart-broken," she said, "to think I can never more do anything for my lady's comfort; and that I shall never, never hear her voice again! I wish I had served her better!"

I had scarcely recovered from the shock of this announcement, when I noticed in this cover a second sheet written in black firm characters by the family lawyer, who had attended my mother's funeral as Lady Sackville's representative.

That writing was easy to read; and when I had scanned the few lines, I had to collect my thoughts sufficiently to take in the fact that my godmother had left me the Croft, and all that it contained, with a fortune which would enable me to live there, as she had lived there, and keep it up in proper style. In fact, except for a few legacies, I was my godmother's sole heiress.

"What shall I do with it?" was my first thought; and I can truly say that the weight oppressed me.

Then I went over the "ifs" and "buts" which in any great crisis of life beset us.

If only I could have endowed Oliffe with this fortune—if only he had loved me—even Mr. Baldwin could have made no objection to our marriage.

But he had drifted away from me—it was my own fault, as I had resolutely refused to fetter him with an engagement. Yes, it was my own fault; but it was not the easier to bear.

So I sat with the letters before me, gazing at them in a confused dreamy fashion, and taking no heed of time.

The night was far on, when there was a tap at my door that I had fastened to be safe from intruders. I rose to open it, and there stood my sister Primrose.

The ball and the banquet were over, and the ladies were retiring; many of the guests were leaving, and the roll of chariot-wheels was incessant.

"The gentlemen staying in the house," Primrose said, "had ordered more wine to the dining-hall; and some were playing high, and all were drinking deep. It's the way of high life!" Primrose said, sighing. "Mr. Castle-Beamish says his health must be drunk till everyone *is* drunk, but honestly he hates it; only nobody must offend the Prince by refusing toasts. Mr. Castle-Beamish has made me an offer of marriage tonight; and if there is no objection raised by Lord Castle-Beamish, the engagement will be formally announced with Judith's in the *Court Circular* next week. It is nice to be engaged," Primrose said; "and *you* ought to be engaged, Althea. It is a great pity; I am so sorry."

"My dear Primrose," I said, "do not be sorry; all things work round for good."

Primrose, though tired, and a little dishevelled, looked very lovely. I hastened to take down her high erection of hair, and remove pins and cushions, and shake out the powder.

I was glad to have something to employ my hands, and I busied myself with Primrose's toilette, as she went on:

"Yes, I *am* sorry; for Judith has behaved very badly. *She* has made Oliffe believe you love Geoffrey Broughton; and I have heard her call you a Methodist, and say everything she could to make him believe that you never wished to be engaged to him. Judith was determined to be Lady Allingham, and it did not matter how it was brought about. But you don't seem to mind much, Althea; and I am sure if you marry Geoffrey Broughton you will be happy—I dare say far happier than we shall be. It is a comfort you don't care about Oliffe—Pring says so. Well, I must go to our room now; I dare say Pring is snoring there. All the waiting-women go to sleep when they are sitting up. Hark!"

Rude sounds of boisterous mirth were now heard in the corridor, and snatches of songs trilled out in a thick voice. Then there was a heavy lunge against our door, and a sound as of a fall; then the voice of a servant:

"Come, sir! hold up, or I'll never get you to bed; and you are come of age, you know." Then more steps, and a cry of:

"Make room there for his Royal Highness, you fools!"

Steady steps approached this time, and a clear voice exclaimed:

"Halloo, Castle-Beamish! what a weak head you've got on your shoulders! Why, man, you've been far behind most of us in your cups!"

His Royal Highness laughed, perhaps rather more loudly than usual; and there was a confused murmur, evidently from the prostrate figure by our door, then more scuffling and bawling, and then all was quiet.

Primrose stood listening and waiting to make her escape to her own room.

It did not strike her—how should it?—that these scenes were a crying disgrace.

Hannah More had set forth the evil in her book called "The Manners of the Great," but Primrose had never read it. I had heard it talked of, and my aunt Norah had ordered it at the book-shop in Abbotsholme.

Alas! if manners make the man, how few real *men* were to be found then! Rather were they slaves to their evil inclinations, and bound by conventional rules, framed on the love of the world, the love of the flesh, and the pride of life.

I put my arm round my sister, and, kissing her, said:

"Before you go I must tell you I have had great news to-night, Primrose: Lady Sackville is dead, and she has left me the Croft, and everything in it."

"Oh, you lucky girl! Why, now you will have everyone at your feet. What will Oliffe say, and Judith? I am glad—vastly glad. Now we are all three provided for; and I do think you are the happiest of the three after all, Althea. Good-night."

Then she returned to say:

"Oliffe seems in a very queer mood to-night, and I think *he* has had his news, and is not vastly pleased with it either. Good-night."

CHAPTER IX.

AFFIANCED BRIDES.

OUR return to Abbotsholme the next day was rendered memorable to us all.

My two sisters were affianced brides, while I was the heiress of a considerable fortune. But when my aunt Norah advanced to meet us, I saw something in her face which implied that there was yet further intelligence to give us.

We were not long in doubt; the door of our old library was opened, and there stood Mr. Baldwin, with the same cold smile on his thin lips, the same glitter in his eyes, and the same perfectly collected manner.

Let who would be disturbed, *he* would show no outward sign of discomposure.

He had been absent three years, all but a few months; his complexion was tanned a sickly yellow, and he had a wig which matched it in colour.

The first words he spoke were insignificant:

"Is Captain Allingham returning this forenoon?" he asked, after making us three sisters a profound reverence.

Judith turned her dark eyes upon him and said:

"We have had no Captain Allingham in our company, sir; you mistake——"

Then my aunt Norah drew nearer and said:

"My dear Judith, Mr. Baldwin has a disclosure to make to you."

"That is an easy matter," Mr. Baldwin said, and backing into the room, by the open door of which he had been standing while we were in the hall; Bellamy and another servant engaged in unloading the great imperial on the coach, which was heavily weighted with our boxes.

"May I beg the favour of you to follow me," Mr. Baldwin said, "and I will explain matters in the presence of Lady Allingham and this trio of lovely sisters?"

We did as we were bidden, and my aunt Norah took my hand and drew it within her arm, the ever-ready sign of her ever-ready sympathy.

The old schoolroom-table was covered with papers, and a large despatch-box stood open. A young man, tall and well built, with a dark complexion and dark eyes, stood by the hearth, his back turned to the mantel-shelf, against which he leaned an arm.

"Lady Allingham, and you, my fair ladies," Mr. Baldwin began, "I must crave leave to introduce to you Lord Allingham, a grandson of the late lord, by the marriage of his son George, his lawful heir, with Madame la Comtesse de la Verney, long resident in the Island of Antigua. My sister's grandson," Mr. Baldwin added; "and I have every possible confirmation of my assertion in these papers."

As we all stood perfectly amazed with the news, Mr. Baldwin proceeded to produce the copies of registers and the mass of information which for two years he had been collecting.

The story may, however, be told in a few words by me.

My uncle, Lord Allingham, had married Mr. Baldwin's sister, and very great unhappiness had followed the marriage. She had left Allingham Park, and taken refuge in the West Indies.

Terrified lest her boy should be claimed by his father, she had kept his birth secret; and when she died he was committed to the care of an old French count, whose only daughter he eventually married.

The present Lord Allingham was their orphan child. Although they knew that he was of noble blood, they had no certain knowledge of his antecedents.

His grandmother had, however, confided the papers and secret of his birth to an old servant, with stringent orders that when old Lord Allingham died, the boy was to be taken to England, and presented as the lawful heir of his father. This servant had been drowned in a passage between Barbadoes and Antigua, and the box containing the papers had been left unnoticed, till Mr. Baldwin, who had some suspicion that his sister might have left an heir, departed on his mission to sift all the evidence.

Determined to gain his end, he had at last succeeded, and stood triumphant with the news that Oliffe was no longer able to claim the position of heir, and that his downfall was complete.

I use the word as expressing what was the state of the case in the eyes of the world; though I know well that what seemed a fall was, in sober earnest, the means whereby he rose to heights which, perchance, might never otherwise have been attained.

Truth is often stranger than fiction, and I believe many families in England could produce stories as romantic as ours. My uncle, Lord Allingham, had, as I said, never been a man to be respected; he married Oliffe's mother after the lapse of many years, and at her death fell under the better influence of a family poor in this world's goods, but rich in faith. His kindness to them in dire need had awoke profound gratitude in their daughter's heart, and she had consented to go to Allingham Park and be a friend to the motherless boy, who stood in a false position, all unwittingly; who had no notion of the dim hope which Mr. Baldwin cherished, and which hope was now fulfilled.

And now let me say that from that first moment of acquaintance, the man who was placed in this strange position bore himself well and kindly towards us.

In all that came and went afterwards I do not think he failed in the behaviour of a gentleman. With his French birth on his mother's side he had inherited a courtesy and chivalrous regard for all women which was remarkable. It was so now in the first moments, when we all stood face to face with the discovery, constrained to acknowledge that this was no false story, conjured up by clever malice, but that in the person of the young stranger we did absolutely see the heir of Allingham.

He did not say much, or make many protestations; but he advanced to my aunt Norah, and taking her hand kissed it, bending on one knee with a grace which few could resist; and then said he begged to know his fair cousins by name.

Judith stood apart, her head thrown back, her travelling-cloak lined with rich fur falling from her graceful figure, her brilliant complexion glowing with the cold drive from Sorleigh; and her dark eyes flashing with pride and haughty determination to hold her ground, and show no sign of the humiliation she really felt.

She had stolen the heart of Oliffe from me; she had compassed her ends by what could hardly be called honourable means; and now she had not won a prize at all!

No Lord Allingham of Allingham Park, but an ensign in the Guards, whose means would now be those of a younger son.

Did she not take in her position as she stood there, like a queen in some tragedy; curtseying as our new relation advanced, and when he attempted to take her hand withdrawing it coldly and proudly?

"Primrose," my aunt Norah said, "is your second cousin." And Primrose, always ready to accommodate herself to circumstances, extended her hand, blushed her prettiest rose-colour, and said with ready tact:

"Yes, I am your cousin Primrose."

My turn came next; and we were just going through the same ceremony, when steps were heard in the hall, and in a moment Oliffe was in the room. He glanced round, and stepping up to Mr. Baldwin, said:

"I have received intimation of the plot you have hatched, sir; but I have to say all documents and proofs must be submitted to a man of business whom *I* shall employ to ascertain how far you are right or wrong. Till this is done I crave permission to consider this matter in abeyance."

"Yes!" Judith said, advancing. "Yes, do not be hoodwinked by an adventurer, my lord."

Oliffe turned to her with a proud sad look.

"You are right, as you always are," he said; "depend upon it, I will hold my ground."

I think I never admired anything more than the manner and behaviour of the new heir to the title and estate. He simply bowed as Oliffe spoke, and said in a voice which had just the *soufflon* of a French accent:

"For my part, my cousin, I am willing to wait any reasonable time for the satisfaction of yourself and those you hold dear."

Oliffe could not be behindhand in courtesy, and he said:

"You at least are free from blame, whatever comes of this; and blame, if blame there be, rests on your grandmother's brother, Mr. Baldwin."

"I am content to bear the blame, my good nephew," Mr. Baldwin said.

"Nephew!" exclaimed Oliffe. "I am no nephew of yours! I am free of that honour! And if, as I hear you assert, my father's hatred of the name of his first wife was so great that he forbade you to mention it in his hearing, and refused to make any inquiries for her, it is surprising that he should have retained you near his person; and to my lasting injury made you my guardian till I am twenty-five."

The great swelling tide of passionate anger was rising, and my aunt Norah, I saw, dreaded a scene. She interposed, saying:

"Will it not be better, my dear boy, to postpone further discussion of this matter until we have taken

legal advice?" Then she took his hand with a gentle restraining power, with one word—"Remember."

With a great effort my cousin Oliffe grew calmer; and so the interview was virtually at an end.

The examination of the papers and the register copies left in no one's mind any reasonable doubt that this young man was the grandson of my uncle, Lord Allingham; and that he was, as the son of his eldest son, the lawful possessor of the estates of Allingham, and the inheritor of the title.

Again plans and counter-plans were discussed.

I suddenly found myself a person of importance, as the heiress of my godmother.

It was decided that I should live at the Croft with my aunt, Lady Allingham; that our old home at Abbots-holme should be kept as a resort for Mr. Castle-Beamish, whose marriage to my sister Primrose was to be celebrated as soon as possible. About that other marriage there was silence. I did not care to ask the question of either Judith or Oliffe; and left them to tell me of their plans.

One day Judith came to me as I was sitting in my own room at night—a chosen time for confidences—and said:

"This is a vastly uncomfortable position in which I find myself."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Oh, you need not feign innocence. Mr. Baldwin looks upon it as a grave misfortune that Oliffe has lost you, *and* the Croft, and the money; and has only got me and my small portion. It is all your fault, Althea; you shilly-shallied with both your lovers, and now you have lost both!" She spoke in a bitter tone,

and I felt more grieved than angry. I knew how hard it must be for her to see all her fair castles fall to the ground. "Why did you not promise to marry Oliffe, child? and then there would have been an end of it."

"Oh, Judith!" I exclaimed; "I acted as I believe was for the best. I was only a child of sixteen when Oliffe told me he loved me. So he *did*, as a child."

"So he does, as a woman," Judith said sharply. "My dear, the play is played out. I am not fitted for poverty, and he knows it. Althea," she said—and to my surprise a great rain of tears fell from her dark eyes—"Althea, Oliffe admires me, calls me his queen, and refers to me for advice; but I do not believe he loves me, and I am miserable!"

Would she have been miserable, I thought, if he had still been Lord Allingham, and she could have looked forward to being mistress at Allingham Park?

It was a strange and bewildering position for me; and as I looked back I thought how much better it would have been had I spoken openly to Oliffe, dispelled the notion from his mind that I was held back from promising to be his wife by any other motive, than that of fearing to bring him into trouble with his guardian, and weighting him with a burden which he might afterwards regret.

But it was useless and vain to go over the past. I could only pray that Judith might really be to him what he wanted, and that some way out of the difficulty might be found for them.

I saw very little of Oliffe during these last few weeks of our residence at Abbotsholme, and nothing was decided as to Judith's future. When Oliffe was of age, there might be some arrangement made. Mean-

while Oliffe rejoined his regiment, and for the present Judith was to remain with Primrose and her husband at Abbotsholme, and my aunt Norah and I were to settle at the Croft.

Primrose was married on a day memorable to the country, the 10th day of March, when instead of the passing of the Regency Bill in the Lords, the formal announcement was made in the House of Commons that the King was restored to health, and the hotly contested Bill, which had been the cause of so much rancour and bitterness, was rendered unnecessary by the King's recovery,

The rejoicings were most sincere, for the King was much beloved, and all right-thinking people quailed at the idea of the Prince of Wales's influence over the morals of the country.

Primrose was a very lovely bride. The marriage was solemnized in the old parish church by the Bishop and Mr. Broughton, and the bride and bridegroom departed for a country-seat belonging to a relation of the Castle-Beamishes in Warwickshire.

After their honeymoon they were to take a house in London, and return to Abbotsholme in the autumn.

Judith, who of all the trio of sisters had been thought most likely to have a brilliant future before her, was now the only one who seemed to have no settled prospect.

I begged her to return to the Croft with me and Lady Allingham, but this she resolutely refused to do. She preferred living at Abbotsholme, and invited the lady, Mrs. Clarke, who had acted as our chaperon at the festivities at Sorleigh to take up her abode with her in the old home.

Mrs. Clarke was only too glad to accept the proposal, and she was ready to administer any amount of flattery to Judith, and to be her devoted slave.

A companion like Mrs. Clarke is not likely to raise the tone of her patroness's mind; and Judith certainly did not improve under her influence.

And so we three sisters drifted apart. I do not know whether the ties of affection had ever been very strong between us; but it was pain, at least I speak for myself, to feel that our home and its associations were finally broken up. I was departing to take up a strange new life. My aunt encouraged me to do so, and be head of my own house. I pleaded unfitness and ignorance, and begged her to be mistress; but this she steadily refused, saying, that when God called us to any place or position, it was our part to try to fulfil its duties, and not shirk our responsibilities.

The establishment at Allingham was formed about the same time, and Mr. Baldwin and his young great-nephew were living there, with a tutor for George, and a much increased staff of servants; for George had a good fortune from his French mother, who was the only child of her parents; and his grandfather, the old Count, had left him all he possessed.

Our first week at the Croft was marked by a national event, too important to pass unnoticed. This was the grand procession to St. Paul's which took place on the 25th of April, when the King went to return thanks to Almighty God for his recovery. A recovery then thought to be complete; though, alas! such was not the case.

The enthusiasm displayed was on this occasion beyond all words. Every lady wore ribands to cele-

brate the auspicious event; and on these ribands was printed, "God save the King—the King restored to health."

My aunt Norah and I, accompanied by Mr. Baldwin and Lord Allingham, were seated in the cathedral for the thanksgiving service.

The vastness of the building, and the crowded benches which were erected for the spectators, rendered seeing difficult, and our long confinement to a cramped position very irksome.

Yet it was a moment in life never to be forgotten, when, after a breathless silence, the strains of the old majestic hymn broke forth, and the "Te Deum Laudamus" ascended to the over-arching dome of the grand building.

It seemed that the voices of the angels were heard floating above us, as the choir sent up the words, "To Thee all Angels cry aloud."

In a block in the crowd of St. Paul's Churchyard—which, though we were there at an early hour, was thronged with thousands—a figure in full uniform caught my attention. It was my cousin Oliffe with a small troop of the Guards, drawn up with military precision.

The sad yet resolute expression on his face I can never forget. He saw us at last, and a smile broke over his face as his young cousin bowed, and aunt Norah kissed her hand. But the look he turned on me brought the tears unbidden to my eyes, and I could scarcely patiently endure to hear Mr. Baldwin's cold remark: "Allingham sits his horse well."

Our life at the Croft was not eventful. My aunt Norah and I settled into a quiet routine which suited

me very well. Tugwell was of course retained, and those old servants who had become utterly useless were pensioned.

It was strange to see Tugwell with the occupation of her life gone, at a loss to know how to employ herself. The sorting and arranging of Lady Sackville's wardrobe, the rough-drying of all the valuable lace, the final disposition of the various articles of dress, occupied Tugwell for many weeks. When that was over, her hands being unemployed, her time hung heavily.

Tugwell did not grow fatter or more cheerful now her bondage was over; on the contrary, the sight of her late mistress's clothes would bring floods of tears, and she would say, "I fancy I hear her calling me, and I am just starting up to go and attend on her; and then I fall back and remember I can serve her no more."

Tugwell is not the only instance of the faithful slave mourning for her task-mistress. It is too true that utterly selfish people are sometimes apparently more mourned than those who have thrown no burdens on others, but have, so to speak, borne their own.

Certain it is, my godmother had a true mourner in poor Tugwell; and instead of springing up into a new life, and regaining spirit and energy, Tugwell sat moping in the little room where she used to dress and curl the fronts on the blocks, and stuff the cushions for their erection on my godmother's head, and crimp with careful fingers the folds of the costly laces.

I was mistress now of everything which the Croft

contained. How I wished I could look back with affection and respect to her who had thus endowed me! Alas! how impossible I felt it to do so!

The only thing which could have made me exultant to be rich was denied me. It was not for me to endow my cousin with my fortune, and so recompense him for the strange event which had taken away from him what he had believed to be his inheritance.

I had proposals of marriage, as a matter of course; but I had no heart to marry, and suspected the motives of several of my admirers.

Mr. Baldwin actually made a proposal, to the effect that an alliance with his great-nephew would be acceptable. I need not say that I repulsed such overtures with indignation, and had a warm supporter in my stern refusal to entertain any such idea in my aunt Norah.

We saw but little of my cousin Oliffe.

My aunt Nora and I paid visits of ceremony to Allingham Park; and Lord Allingham wisely decided to enter at Christ Church, Oxford, and make the best of his advantages there.

A certain sense of home began to come over me at Windsor. I do not think it would be possible to live in Windsor without getting attached to the place.

The lovely Chapel of St. Georges' became as the home of my spirit. My aunt Norah and I attended the service there frequently; and cold indeed must be the heart that does not awake to a sense of the beauty of that richly carved and fretted roof, and the loveliness of the window in the east end.

Here, too, I made a friend of one of the old Mili-

tary Knights, who had an interest in the Chapel, and all connected with it. He was a grey-haired veteran, who was always to be seen in his stall. These stalls are richly carved, and the knights' banners float over them; and the canopy of carved work supports the sword, mantle, and helmet and crest of each knight.

My old friend, Colonel Wynnyatt, had been shot in the back, and incapacitated for active service, in the great "Forty-five." He had done such good service in the King's cause, that he was recommended for a Military Knight at a comparatively early age.

He delighted to wander about with me, leaning heavily on his thick stick, and relate all the adventures of those stirring times, and live over again the great fight of Prestonpans.

He lived with an old sister in one of the quaint houses which are apportioned to the knights, and lamented the want of neighbourly feeling which existed between the families of the knights.

Jealousies and rivalries were rife, and royal favour courted, and royal notice eagerly desired; some were pleased, others chagrined: and so the little coterie of Military Knights of Windsor went on its way like the great world outside their borders and above them.

Many pleasant strolls I enjoyed with Colonel Wynnyatt, and many a story did he tell me as we wandered from the "hundred steps" to the Terrace, and on to the lower road of Windsor Castle, where the great Tomb House of Cardinal Wolsey stands—a monument, indeed, of fallen pride.

Defaced and despoiled during the Great Rebellion, the beautiful statues of gilt copper and their orna-

ments were sold for £600, to enrich those who were bearing arms against their King.

Little Miss Burney was now maid of honour to the Queen, and was closely confined by her duties; but she did not forget me, and several times invited me to tea in her rooms in the Castle. I had no lack of acquaintances, and, had we been so disposed, my aunt Norah and I might have been plunged in all the gaieties of the world, which after the King's recovery were carried on with greater zest than ever.

In the year 1792, my cousin Oliffe was ordered for foreign service under the Duke of York, who laid siege to Dunkirk. It will not be necessary for me to record here all the frightful scenes which were enacting in France.

The murder of the King and the Queen; the bloodshed—the lawlessness there! These do not belong to the history of a life like mine. But that siege of Dunkirk, when our troops were ignominiously driven back, has a special significance for me. After agonies of suspense and terrible forebodings, news at last reached us that Captain the Honourable Oliffe Allingham was severely wounded, and lay in peril of his life.

I do not know how I got through that time of suspense—that waiting and watching for tidings which wears out the stoutest heart, and tries the most steadfast faith.

It was at this time that my old friend Colonel Wynnyatt was so great a comforter. He who had been so desperately wounded himself could not give up hope.

He encouraged me to believe Oliffe would return.

He guessed my secret, but, with that chivalrous feeling which characterized him, he did not pry into my affairs. Having simply said once that I was not affianced to my cousin, he accepted the announcement, and asked no more questions.

Judith came to Windsor about this time, and brought Mary Vidal with her. Judith was incomprehensible.

"I hope," she said, "he is not disfigured by his wounds. I do trust he is not lamed for life. Imagine Oliffe hobbling on a stick!"

"Oh, hush!" I exclaimed. "I cannot bear to hear you speak thus; it breaks my heart!"

"Poor little Althea!" Judith would say jestingly. "Poor little Althea! It is *my* heart that ought to break—if I had one."

Mary Vidal had become a very sweet and attractive young woman; she was delighted to be with me, and was full of that quiet sympathy which is so infinitely precious when the heart is sore and burdened; and yet cannot tell of its burden to others.

Mr. Baldwin was full of laments about Oliffe. Especially he dwelt on the success of the purchase he had made in the West Indies; of the estates in his name, likely, he said, to yield a noble income.

In very deed we were all plentifully supplied with that great factor in life, money; and yet—let me say it for those who read my story, and are feeling the pinch of insufficient means—yet, in itself, how powerless is money to bring ease of heart and mind!

My aunt Norah, who before her marriage had known all the evils of poverty, rejoiced in the ability that wealth gave of ministering to those who needed

help. Countless were her deeds of charity and thoughtful kindness of which no earthly eye took notice, but which our Father in heaven saw and remembered. Yes, He *remembered* as He had promised, and made all her bed in her sickness when the time came.

Those days and weeks of watching and waiting were rendered more terribly wearing by Judith's presence. She maintained a hard and almost defiant air; and if she mentioned Oliffe at all, it was only to lament the probability of his being disabled for life, even if he recovered and came home. Even *if* he came home. Oh, how much hung on that "*if*!"

I went over all the possibilities of my cousin's return; of his appearance; if he had lost a limb; or if he had been wounded, so that, like my old friend the knight of Windsor, he might be crippled for the rest of his life.

Then Judith—what would be her feelings? Oh, should I not, *could* I not have loved him a thousand times better, if he had more need of my love! But Judith! That was indeed a different question. Judith attracted admiration wherever she went. As a woman, she was more beautiful than a girl; and, as I expected, several men about Windsor were at her feet.

Strange it was to notice how our positions were reversed. In times past *I* had been considered by Mr. Baldwin as a very poor *parti* for Oliffe. Now *I* was rich and in a good independent position, he coveted me for Lord Allingham, his great-nephew; while he looked jealously on George's evident admiration for Judith!

So strangely mixed were our relations with each other, so hopelessly tangled, it seemed hard to find a clue.

At last Miss Burney summoned me to the Castle; where she was in attendance; saying she had news for me and for my sister.

"It must be that despatches have arrived, and the full extent of the Duke of York's disaster is known—and—" My lips refused to pronounce the words which rose to them—"and whether Oliffe is dead or alive!"

Mary Vidal, calm and quiet, accompanied me to Miss Burney's apartment.

Judith had not completed her elaborate toilette, at which she found Tugwell a willing assistant; and my aunt did not feel able to bear the exertion of presenting herself at the Castle.

Mary and I therefore went alone; and as we passed through the quadrangle of the Castle we saw knots of people collected, evidently discussing the news that had been brought post-haste to the War Office, and passed on to the King and his Ministers.

We found Miss Burney awaiting us. Her kind heart now asserted itself; and all her little affectations and ecstatic expressions of admiration, were lost in the real and serious concern she showed for me.

"The despatches have come," she said. "Now, my sweet girl, sit down by me, and I will relate what should make you proud. Captain Allingham's name is mentioned as severely wounded."

"I know *that*," I said; "and so does Judith."

"Yes, severely wounded; and the defeat of the Duke's troops is most disastrous. But he himself has written to the dear and honoured lady, his mother, my royal mistress, and in that letter he says: 'Captain Allingham distinguished himself by the most noble

courage. He made a gallant stand against a detachment of Jacobins, and in rescuing one of his fellow-officers from the stroke of a bayonet he was hit in the knee by a bullet, and dropped. They carried him from the field with great difficulty, but his life is saved, we trust—we hope. His leg has been amputated; and, besides the shot, he has a bad sword-cut on his shoulder. We——”

I remember no more—Miss Burney, Mary, and the room all faded away, and I fell into a swoon, and remember nothing till, with returning consciousness, I saw a lady bending over me with a kind benignant face, on which were the marks of many sorrows.

“Poor child!” Queen Charlotte said. “Poor child! Is she the betrothed bride of this gallant officer, of whom my son, the Duke of York, writes?”

“Nay, madam,” I heard Miss Burney say; “not his betrothed bride, but his cousin, Althea Allingham.”

CHAPTER X.

THE WARRIOR'S RETURN.

My cousin Oliffe returned before the end of the year; I was sitting alone in the parlour of the Croft, when all unexpectedly he stood before me.

The great change in his appearance was even greater than I had expected. His face was wan, and showed traces of the pain he had suffered.

There had been a gun-shot wound in the knee, that made amputation necessary; and there was a sabre-cut on the left shoulder, which compelled him to use a sling.

Thus he came home, after hovering for months between life and death; and I was alone to welcome him. My first impulse was to cry aloud in the extremity of my mingled grief and joy. Grief, that he was so altered; joy, that he had escaped with his life. But that first impulse was repressed; and I only laid my hand in his, and quietly pushed a chair towards him, into which he sank.

"Where is my mother?" he asked; "and your sister?"

"They are at Allingham Park to-day," I said; "paying a visit of ceremony to my sister Primrose, who is on a visit there with her husband."

"And you are alone?"

"Yes; the chariot only holds two with comfort."

"It held three in old times," he said with a smile. "Do I not remember a little girl who was sitting between a large lady and a thin one, as bodkin?"

"Nay," I said, glad to make a diversion from the present, to see a smile lighting up his face. "Nay; the thin one was already on the floor of the coach when you rode up, Cousin Oliffe."

"Ah, that is true!" he said. "And now tell me, Althea, would you have known me if you had met me unawares?"

"Why not?" I answered. "You are the same to me, only——" I dared not trust myself to say more; and now the chariot-wheels were heard below the windows, and I, starting up, said:

"They have returned."

In another moment Judith came in. She started back and exclaimed, after a pause:

"Oliffe! how dreadful!"

My aunt Norah followed more slowly, and soon had clasped our warrior in her arms, with murmured words of tenderness.

"Well, mother," he said, rallying from the cold greeting of his affianced wife. "Well, mother, *you* have at least a welcome for the old soldier, who is come home a useless cripple for life."

"My dearest boy," my aunt said, "such wounds are honourable; and there is much work yet left for those two brave arms which made such a gallant fight. No outward loss can change the inner soul—a brave soul like yours."

Oliffe took his mother's hands in his again, and kissing them fondly, said:

"You always speak a word of comfort, mother."

But Judith had no word—she seemed struck dumb with amazement, till at last, seating herself with a sigh opposite him, she murmured:

"It is so much worse than I thought."

I think no one who has followed this history up to this point will be surprised to find that Oliffe very quickly released Judith from her engagement to him. He took the whole matter upon himself, and never allowed it to be supposed that her coldness and positive shrinking from him, in his present condition, was the real reason of the severance of the tie. Judith was one of those people to whom the sight of physical suffering is almost repulsive. She would have had all the world paragons of beauty, and untouched by disease.

As I think I have said before, she was scarcely to be called vain; but she was intensely proud—proud of her beauty, and proud of her healthful and splendid physique.

I think if Oliffe had remained Lord Allingham, and master of the Park; and even if he had returned unscathed from his first campaign, covered with glory and not with wounds, it would have been different. Judith would have held to her engagement; and the rest of my story would never have been written.

It had been a strange engagement from the beginning; and it is not mere conceit on my part to say that it was on Oliffe's side the result of disappointment—as he believed, in me; and on Judith's side simply a desire for a brilliant marriage, a cordial admiration of the young guardsman, and a feeling that she was, when Lady Allingham, likely to have all her early dreams fulfilled.

Judith announced her freedom to me the day before her departure to Abbotsholme with Primrose and her husband.

"It is impossible for Oliffe to marry now," she said; "we shall always be very good friends, and I am sure we may be proud to have Colonel the Honourable Oliffe Allingham for our cousin. He is naturally anxious that all this affair should be as quietly got over as possible; and half the world has forgotten that before George came to the Park, Oliffe and I were engaged. It will make no particular sensation—there are so many other things before people's minds."

This was true, and when Judith drifted away there was very little remark made. She was not a person to be missed by friends, and acquaintances had something else to occupy them.

The sensation came later, when she returned in the spring of the following year and had realized her hopes. She was really mistress of the Park, having

given her hand quietly to George, who was a good deal younger than she was, but who had braved the wrath of Mr. Baldwin, and without telling him of his purpose, had married his bride by special license in the private chapel of Sorleigh Hall. Then with a decision which characterized him, and a strength of will which was in fact rather like what Mr. Baldwin described it, "mulish obstinacy," he brought her back to Allingham, merely saying, that if his uncle did not wish to remain there he was at liberty to remove, for he could easily find another steward to look after his estate and protect his interests.

Mr. Baldwin, like many of us, had to accept the inevitable; no fuming and no invective could change his fate. The deed was done, and his autocratic reign at Allingham Park was over. He had struggled hard to recover his sister's grandson and put him in possession. He had done so, with a certain vindictive pleasure that by George's acknowledged right to the estate and title he had dispossessed Oliffe, and so revenged himself for the many outbreaks of boyish anger and rebellion against his authority, from which I do not deny he had suffered, and which Oliffe himself was the last to excuse.

We are all slow to believe how very slight is the impression our own personal affairs make upon the outer world.

"The old saying, 'a nine days' wonder,' my dearest child," Miss Burney said to me when the bride arrived at Allingham Park and behaved as if she had been *la grande dame* there for years.

Judith had a certain *savoir faire* which it is hard to acquire if it is not inherent. Never did I see her

show any awkwardness either in meeting Oliffe or me; she was always mistress of the occasion.

I think those who were inclined to gossip were a little disappointed that Colonel Allingham was seen so little at Windsor or Allingham Park. His health rendered it necessary for him to be continually under treatment at Bath, for a severe rheumatism attacked his maimed limb, and he found the Bath waters a great relief.

It was in the summer of 1793 that Miss Burney announced to me her intended marriage to Monsieur d'Arblay. She was in the neighbourhood, and came over to see me, full of her news; and I think, though grieved to vex her father, Dr. Burney, who did not consider a Frenchman a sufficiently good alliance for his daughter, she rather enjoyed the little spice of romance which her devotion to a soldier of fortune gave to her marriage.

From the very early days when I first went to Windsor, a shy child of scarce sixteen, Miss Burney had been very kindly disposed to me. I had often heard her relate the discomforts of that high position as maid of honour to the Queen, which brought about her resignation. In fact, that resignation had taken place before the news of the siege of Dunkirk, when she had so kindly sent for me that I might hear the real history of the disaster from head-quarters. Miss Burney was then only paying a formal visit of a few days to Windsor at the Queen's request, with whom she was a great favourite.

When she had told me of her happy future, she questioned me as to mine, and begged me not to throw away the chances of a devoted husband.

In vain I pleaded that I had no chances to throw away; that since my sister had married and become mistress of Allingham Park my aunt Norah and I had led more retired lives. But Miss Burney was not to be put off. Why did I not plainly say my heart was engaged, and that therefore my hand could not be bestowed without it?

It was true, and I did not deny it; but it never struck Miss Burney that my heart had been firm, even through the changes and chances of the earlier part of my cousin Oliffe's life. It did not seem to strike her; and I believe the only person who knew me and saw what was in my heart, was my aunt Norah.

Even gentle Mary Vidal was inclined to take for granted that my love could not survive the shock of knowing that my cousin had transferred his allegiance from me to my beautiful sister; and could not understand that I had never known—could never know—any love but his.

I do not pretend to fathom the depths of other hearts; but I *do* know that in mine was no thought of anyone in the relation of lover but Oliffe—my first and only love. As the time went on, I wondered a little that he did not come more often. The Bath waters began to effect a cure, and he became much stronger and more like his old self.

About this time Mary Vidal was married to Geoffrey Broughton; and at Mary's earnest request I took the journey to Abbotsholme, and was present at her wedding.

When I saw her, serene and trusting and happy, setting out on a life of usefulness with her husband, and preparing to bid what would probably be a life-

long adieu to her native land—for they were going to the farther parts of India to a mission station there—I confess I felt like one left on a stranded ship on a barren shore, by a retreating tide. I had so early been awakened from my childhood to womanhood, that I am confident I felt far, far older than my years at this time. I saw my sisters happy in their own way, the one with the power she loved, admired and sought after; the other, pretty and graceful, and with that mild sweetness of manner which is often mistaken for unselfishness.

Primrose always smiled, and always looked serene and pretty, and dressed becomingly. Her husband was contented, and her children saw very little of their mother. It may be said that to look at and admire her was her children's portion. A sudden entrance into the room and a quick eager relation of some childish joy or sorrow was unknown to them.

I returned from Mary Vidal's wedding to what seemed the grey shadows of a quiet uneventful life. It is true there was plenty going on around to excite and interest us. We paid a visit to Allingham Park at intervals, and I am bound to say always received a welcome. A deferential one from poor Mr. Baldwin, who had become a bent and aged man. He did not find his great-nephew George any easier to govern than his *soi-disant* nephew Oliffe; and finding remonstrance useless, he quietly acquiesced, and now wandered over the estate in a somewhat aimless fashion, often finding his orders were countermanaged by his nephew, and feeling that his day was over.

George was entirely ruled by Judith; and although she covered her authority with a fair amount of seem-

ing deference to her husband's wishes, everyone knew she was the mainspring, and the machinery would stop without her.

Our visit this year, 1799, was late, but the November weather was as mild and soft as May. Everyone was full of the great *coup d'état* which had placed Napoleon Bonaparte at the head of affairs in France; and the news had just been brought in that he was proclaimed First Consul, and had addressed a letter to our King making proposals of peace. This act was condemned as the act of an upstart, and contrary to the etiquette of Court; and the discussion ran high at the breakfast-table at the Park on the morning when the news was circulated.

"France needs rest and government," I ventured to say.

"Not the rest purchased by submission to the arrogant Bonaparte," said Judith. "I believe, Althea, you would concede anything for peace, whereas I would——"

She was stopped by the entrance of her little son, a fine dark-eyed boy of five years old. Judith, who ruled everyone around her, was undoubtedly ruled by this young autocrat. The stiff decorum in which we had been brought up was relaxed; and Master Primrose followed his own wishes, at the expense of other peoples', unrestrained.

"Mother," he cried, "our lame cousin is come. Baynes kissed his hand when he got into the hall, and the servants are making such a fuss. But I am glad he is come, for I like him. See, I will take him that bunch of grapes from the sideboard."

"No, Primrose," Judith said. But the boy never

heeded a "no;" he climbed on a chair, seized the grapes, and running off, called out!

"I shall eat half myself, of course—that's why I got them. Hurrah!"

"That is very naughty," I said. "Primrose, see you have thrown down a quantity of sugar"—for he had upset the large silver basin which stood on the sideboard, filled with powdered sugar.

"What does that matter?" Judith said, as her husband exclaimed, "The young rascal ought to be whipped!" "What does it matter? You are getting very old-maidish, Althea!"

The words must have been heard by Oliffe, who now came in, little Primrose dangling the grapes before him, having eaten more than half the bunch. Judith rose to greet Oliffe, and George said:

"Well, where do you spring from? Welcome as you always are."

"So this little fellow wishes to show me, it seems," Oliffe said, as he walked round the table and seated himself between Judith and aunt Norah, kissing her affectionately. "I have been in Scotland, amongst Dr. Johnson's savages," Oliffe said. "The bracing has done more for me than the Bath waters."

"You look uncommonly well," George said; "quite young again. You have heard the news, I suppose?"

Then they fell to discussing the French news; and, as Primrose became very uproarious and troublesome, teasing Oliffe, and asking innumerable questions, I asked leave to take him out with me, as the morning was so fine.

"Yes, do come, aunt Althy; there's a lot of big

blackberries down by the river. I'll get Sam, the stable-boy, to come with us."

"We will not trouble Sam," I said; "nor Mrs. Carter either."

"I won't have *her!*" he exclaimed; "I hate having her screaming at me not to do this, and not to do that. Mother says you are prim and old-maidish, but Carter——"

George sternly ordered the child to be quiet, and I left the room, followed by my very much spoiled, but still attractive nephew.

"Don't look cross, aunt Althea," he said; "I love you twenty thousand times better than anyone else. Now I will be very good; and will you tell me stories, and be kind?"

I went to fetch my cloak and hood, and before I returned to the hall, Carter, the boy's nurse and caretaker, had captured him, and carried him off to be more warmly clothed before he went into the open air.

I pursued my way alone, turning from the terrace to the copse, and falling into a rehearsal of the past, in which most women delight. It is in this we are so different from men. I do not believe men recall as we do the little incidents which form the pictures we store up in our memory, and which are sometimes so vivid in colouring that the Past seems Present, and the lapse of time lost.

On this mild November day there was a similarity in all outward things to that day so long ago, when I, a child of scarce sixteen, first knew my cousin Oliffe. The tender blue sky above; the golden-brown bracken in the Park; the murmuring river; the long wet grass, which my skirts touched as I passed; the silence,

broken only by the murmur of the water; the caw of distant rooks; the lowing of cattle. Peace, the peace of the dying year, seemed to wrap me in its mantle. What if life had been a different life? what if the dream of sixteen had been realized, and I had been Oliffe's wife?

Now, I was continually reminded by Judith, and by others also, that my first youth was over. I heard myself called prim and old-maidish, and it might be true. I had passed a quiet childhood in the old Abbotsholme house. I had come out of that for a short season into the gaiety of the world, and what the world counted delights; and then a storm of trouble, and an acceptance of the inevitable—a resigning of what I held most precious, and by degrees that quiet condition of mind and spirit which comes to those who try to see that in *everything* there is the Hand of Love guiding and ordering our ways.

In all these years, since Judith had married George, and Oliffe was free, I had come to think of him always tenderly, always with admiration of his noble courage, but as separated from me by a gulf which he made no sign of wishing to bridge over.

We met as friends should meet; but when we were alone together, which was but seldom, there was ever present *something* which held us apart.

Oliffe had suffered much in health, and had been a great deal at Bath, at Buxton, and Brighthelmstone for bathing and medical advice.

Athletic and active, the loss of his leg had for some time seriously affected his health; for he was debarred by it from healthful and manly exercises in

which he had delighted, and the profession of a soldier was closed to him henceforth.

Of all these outward circumstances I knew much, but of the inner working of his life little or nothing; though I guessed how hard it was for him to hear the call to arms, and to read of the victories of our troops, and to be condemned to inaction.

I was standing now very near the spot where the trout had been landed on that to me memorable morning, many years ago. As I write that word *many*, I think how *few* they seem now, when I am so far advanced in my pilgrimage that the difference between sixteen and thirty seems small indeed.

Was Oliffe thinking of me, and of those times? I turned, and saw him within a few yards of me; and something in his face told me that the barrier which had been between us was broken down.

He came towards me, leaning on his stout stick with a large crook at the end. He had never used a crutch, and his fine athletic figure was but little bent or distorted.

"Althea," he said, "I am so glad to find you here, where you found me once, long ago. I have a tale to tell you; can you listen patiently? Althea, little cousin, I stand before you a cripple, with nothing to offer you but my heart. It has always been yours. Nay, do not turn away and look as if you could not believe such an assertion. It is true, nevertheless. A mistake—a delusion—separated us years ago. I think I was mad—and there was scant excuse for my madness. I chose to misinterpret your brave childlike sincerity of purpose, which refused to allow you to bring, as you thought, trouble upon me, by promising

to be my wife. I was angry with you, and then I was told you never had cared for me. The result you know, and the bitter end. For all these years I have kept apart from you till I felt that I was at last strong and full of vigour. If you can come to me, at least it will not be as a nurse to a sick man. I am well aware there will be the ever-ready tongues of the scandal-lovers set in motion. You, an independent lady of fortune, with a house and establishment, with attractions manifold; I, a dispossessed heir, with nothing, absolutely nothing, to offer you, except my love and allegiance, which, forsooth, the world will say, I once withdrew. And much more they will say——”

“Stop, please, Oliffe,” I said. “What does all this matter? What does it matter what the world outside says? this only rests between you and me. Let me have time to think.”

“Ah!” he said, with a sigh, “I deserve it. You will be sure to refuse me!”

“Nay, I would not say as much,” I pleaded; “but——”

“You cannot trust me. I grant you, my life was no theme for praise in those early days when I knew you first. I grant it, I confess it; but, Althea, I was brought face to face with death on the battle-field. The brave men fell around me; the cries of the wounded were in my ear. I think, as I lay shot down in that terrible carnage, my eyes were opened—I seemed to see myself as I was. God grant that the long suffering which followed, the pain and the desolation of heart, may never lose their effect on

me. Life was real and earnest to me then for the first time."

More, much more Oliffe said, as we stood together there, as we had stood before—the same, yet not the same. The murmur of the water rippling over the stones; the whisper of the wind in the trees, whence the yellow leaves were falling in silent showers; the sunshine glancing through the branches, and making a checker-work of light and shade on the carpet of withered leaves which strewed the path. Suddenly the profound stillness was broken by a scream:

"Master Primrose, you will be in the water!"

It was Carter's loud voice.

We started and turned, and there on a boulder of rock, almost in mid-stream, stood my nephew, in his thick blue surtout, his wide-frilled collar, and long dark hair hanging over it.

"You naughty, wicked boy!" Carter screamed. "Oh, come back, do!"

Oliffe and I hastened to a corner of the bank whence two or three steps led down to the water. The child seemed to enjoy the terror of Carter, who stood frantically wringing her hands, and yet helpless to do anything but scream and shout at Primrose.

He had jumped over several bits of rock, and now stood on a slippery boulder, round which the water rippled, and little wavelets danced merrily.

"Do not shout to him; you will only make his position more perilous," Oliffe said. "Be quiet, and run back to the house for help."

The water was swirling in a deep pool on the farther side of the boulder, and the spot was known,

as the whirlpool; for the stream met another just above it, and the two met and swirled round and round, sucking in any sticks or leaves that fell on its surface.

Carter rushed off, and Oliffe and I were left on the bank.

"Where's Carter running?" the child said. "I shall stay here; it's so nice. I like to see the water tearing round and round."

Then I got as near the edge as possible, and said:

"Primrose, do you hear? come back by the way you went, and I will stretch out my hand to help you."

"But I *like* to be here," the child said. "Wait a bit. Oh! there's a big fish, and a *tiny, teeny* little frog, and—"

Oliffe had just, with some difficulty, let himself down the bank, on a level with the stream, when, with a cry of "I am slipping, aunt Althea!" the blue surtout and the long dark hair disappeared, as the boy fell into the pool on the other side.

Oliffe did not hesitate for an instant; he waded to the spot, and though it was difficult indeed for him to grapple with the roughness of the bed of the stream, and the eddying water around him, he went gallantly on, and I saw him disappear behind the boulder into the pool.

The pool was deep, and the current strong. Then I stood helpless, except that I felt that agony of un-spoken prayer which those who have watched the danger of the beloved of their soul know to be their only refuge.

Was the cup to be dashed again from my lips? Was the end to come upon me now, now that I had just realized that in perfect confidence I could give myself to Oliffe?

Thoughts like these surged through my mind as I stood in the stream, trying to steady myself against the rough uneven ledges of the boulder, and watching the dark eddying pool below. It could only have been two or three moments—it seemed like hours, days—nay, that concentrated agony of suspense cannot be measured.

Presently I heard his voice:

"I have him fast; but I cannot reach the bank."

The voice was one of distress, and the last words were weak.

"I think I can reach your hand without falling," I said. I had Oliffe's stick, and was myself standing nearly up to my knees in mid-stream under the boulder.

With a desperate effort I steadied myself; and with one hand grasping the uneven surface of the rock, with the other I held out the stick. I felt it taken hold of, with the words:

"Take care—take care of yourself, my darling!"

But by God's help I stood firm; and in another moment I felt myself seized from behind. George had come at Carter's call; and now was just in time to help Oliffe to struggle out of the pool into the shallow water.

"My boy! my boy!" George exclaimed, as he steadied himself against the rock, and took the child from Oliffe's firm grasp.

"Is he dead? Oh, my God! is he dead?"

And now there was a crowd on the bank above the stream, and very soon we were all collected there. Oliffe, faint and exhausted, but victorious—for the boy was not dead; he gasped and opened his eyes, and the water poured from his mouth. George carried him in his arms towards the house; and his mother and aunt Norah met him.

I shall never forget Judith's face. The great maternal instinct, which can ennoble the nature of a woman as nothing else can, was now triumphant. My beautiful sister had never looked so beautiful as at that moment, when George said:

"The boy lives; and Oliffe Allingham has saved him."

Yes, the heir of Allingham was saved by the heroic arm which, in spite of that infirmity of body which rendered his deed still more heroic than under ordinary circumstances it would have been. Thus a bond henceforth bound Lord Allingham with a chivalrous respect and gratitude to the cousin whom he had superseded.

From henceforth, too, Oliffe seemed to have a special part and lot in that boy; and the child responded to him, as he did to no one else, with a strange mixture of admiration and affection.

Oliffe and I walked but slowly to the house. I was burdened by my wet clothes, and was overtaken with a nervous shuddering, which was the precursor of an illness.

For some weeks I was only able to lie quietly in my own little sitting-room, ministered to by loving hands, and by close and unrestrained intercourse

with Oliffe, making up, as it were, for the long separation.

On the first day of the century I was married to Oliffe in the old parish church of Windsor; and from that hour there began for me a life of happiness that no clouds were sufficient to dim. Ah, verily, the wife of a true man may well give thanks to God!

Perhaps there never was a time in the history of our country when this gift of holy and pure married love was more highly prized by its possessors.

For, alas! in the high places of the earth there were sorrowful examples of the misery of unfaithfulness; and the family of our beloved King was torn by domestic troubles, and the heart of the Queen Mother often heavy within her on account of the sad conduct and example of her eldest son.

The domestic life of royalty is always seen and noticed. The light which of necessity beats upon the throne shows us every blemish distinctly, as well as every virtue.

As I write now, in the early years of our young Queen Victoria's reign, how thankfully do I record that never in my long life have I seen a more beautiful example of a young wife and mother than she presents to her people!

Long indeed may she know the joys of home, and find in her husband's love the solace for the cares of royalty which must needs press heavily on one so young.

Long may her fair brow be as free from the traces of care and sorrow as now it is; long may she rest secure in the love of her noble young husband, who

seems to have a remarkable wisdom, purity of aim, and sagacity far beyond his years!

But my story yet lies in the years far removed from that *present*, to which I have alluded in passing—just as an old woman's tribute of respect, loyalty, and love for my young sovereign, Queen Victoria.

BOOK III.

"Grow old along with me;
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made.
Our times are in His Hand
Who saith, 'A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God; see all, nor be afraid.'"

ROBERT BROWNING.

CHAPTER XI.

HAPPINESS.

1817. BETWEEN the opening day of the century, when Oliffe and I were married, to the year which I have written as the date of this part of my life's story, lies a season of what I might almost call unmixed happiness.

As I passed through it, I continually wrote in my diary a few words expressing my joy and thankfulness. Children were given us, and our first-born was a boy. He was born on the second anniversary of our marriage-day, and was precious, as first-born children ever are, awakening, as they do, by the touch of their baby fingers, the sweetest music which ever echoes through this transitory life.

In these first days of possession there is almost a sense of awe, so different from all other ties is that which binds the mother to her child, and kindles in the father's heart an unwonted, and often to himself

a surprising interest in the little feeble infant which he calls proudly "my son."

Our boy was a fair and delicate child, and was followed within three years by two strong and vigorous little sisters, who kept up our family traditions, and were twins.

They were born in May, and we called them fondly our Mayflowers—merry, laughing little creatures, who seemed made up of sunshine and brightness. "Welcome as flowers in May," is written in my diary against the date of their birthdays, and we baptized them Stella and Benvenuta.

Their bright childhood is one of the brightest of their mother's memories; and I turn with delight to our morning walks in the Castle grounds at Windsor, and to our visits to Allingham Park, where they were the pets and playthings of their cousin—the only child of George and my sister Judith.

Our boy's health was never strong, and he was unfitted for the school-life at Eton, and dependent upon his father and me for his education. We therefore led a very quiet and united life at the Croft, and knew as yet nothing of separation.

My youngest child was born when St. John was eleven, and his sisters eight years old. He came to us long, long after the nursery had been closed, and the joy of his birth was clouded a little by my long illness which succeeded it, and the death of our dear mother—the aunt Norah of my early days.

Her beautiful life grew more beautiful as it sank into the valley of the shadow; the eventide light was so soft and radiant that we scarcely could believe the end was near. A tender sadness was over us when

we lost her, and my boy, whom we named Stephen—as Olliffe said he was the crown of our happy married life—seemed to be sent to us as a gleam of joy.

I wonder if all mothers feel as I do in old age. The men and women with lines of care on their brow, and streaks of grey in their hair, are not more really present than the “vanished children” whose places they have taken.

Often between the dawn and the day, when the sleep of the aged is taking wings, and I lie in the hush and stillness of all outward things, pictures of the past float before me.

I see my children in the old nursery at the Croft —my merry, laughing girls; and sweet, thoughtful St. John, patiently bearing their somewhat noisy merriment, in which he can hardly take part. Then baby Stephen, running with uncertain steps to demolish a high tower of bricks his sisters had built for his amusement, and shouting with glee as the erection came down with a mighty crash. Then the sound, the ever-welcome sound, of their father’s stick as he came up the corridor; and the opening of the nursery door, and the cry of “Father!”

The faces, the voices, the very gestures of my children come back; and I forget all that lies between, and those happy days in the dear old Croft are mine once more.

Sweet, too, is the memory of peaceful Sunday evenings, when the children listened to my Bible stories, accepting them with that unquestioning faith which I always think brought from the lips of the Master the words: “Except ye be converted and be-

come as *little children*, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom."

But I must not prolong these memories; they shall be concentrated now in a November day in this year, 1817, when we were all to celebrate Stephen's fourth birthday, at Allingham Park.

Oliffe had accepted a post in the War Office, and was a chief secretary there. It was impossible for him to live without an occupation, and he liked to be brought in contact with the profession he really loved, and to be kept *au courant* with the state of affairs in the stirring times which had marked the first fifteen years of the century. The battle of Waterloo had decided the fate of Europe; but all thoughtful people looked on the peace with some foreboding, and the state of England was most unsatisfactory.

Discontent amongst the agricultural and manufacturing classes alike, was rife. The high price of provisions, the severe winters, and the bad harvest, caused a great deal of real distress; while there was yet but a very slight effort made by those in power to meet the needs of the masses. Bright lights there were in the firmament. William Wilberforce, with his grand schemes for the Abolition of the Slave-trade; Mrs. Hannah More, who had bidden a last farewell to the gay world, where I remembered her when I was sixteen, and was now the deeply religious woman, carrying on her work by the pen, and by her personal efforts amongst the people of the villages under the Mendip Hills.

Then there was awakening life in the Church, which had been slumbering so long. The great

Evangelical movement had done something to bring her "in touch" with the masses. Only those who, like myself, are old enough to remember all that the great fathers of the Evangelicals did to kindle sleeping energies and zeal within her borders can be grateful as they ought to be, to the men who were the champions of Evangelical truth, and called upon the Church to arise and do her duty by her sons and daughters.

In all these movements my husband took a keen interest. The ardour of his early manhood was chastened, but his spirit was always the same, and he gave his sympathy and support to all works which were for the good of those around him.

From choice we had little now to do with the gay world; and when it became known that balls and routs were not congenial to us, we were very much left to ourselves.

"When the children grow up," Olliffe would say, "they shall have such society as may befit their position, and we will not be selfish and force them to follow our inclinations."

It was a fixed law in all my husband's dealings with his children, his servants, and everyone over whom he had rule, that *coercion* was not only useless, but harmful. I think the remembrance of poor Mr. Baldwin's rod of iron and attempt to crush out his spirit instead of directing it, had a marked influence on his whole future life. He had felt how good it was to be influenced by his stepmother instead of driven by fear; and though he was firm as a rock when it was a question of right or wrong, he was tender and gentle to the weak and erring, though stern

in his judgment of anything like deceit or double dealing.

My Stephen's fourth birthday was a lovely November day. We had all been invited for three or four days to Allingham Park, and Primrose and her youngest children were there also.

It was a large party, and the old house was full of merriment, and the glad sound of children's voices.

Oliffe was obliged to sleep at his Club in London when there was any pressure of business at the War Office; but he had promised to be with us in time for the birthday feast which Mrs. Bean had provided.

The children were all out in the grounds in the bright autumn sunshine, and I was resting for a quiet hour in the old morning-room, when Judith came in. Judith was still a very handsome woman, but her face was often sad and uneasy in its expression.

"Oh, here you are!" she said. "I am glad to find you alone. I want to talk to you. I am miserable about Primrose—he is so wilful and careless of my feelings. He fancies he is in love, too, with a girl quite beneath him; and now he has taken a craze to go out to the West Indies to look after the property. I *can't* part with him!" she said passionately; "and I *won't!*—and never, never receive the girl he says he wants to marry."

Her dark eyes flashed; and then the fire was put out by a flood of tears.

"What does George say?"

"George! he does not care. He says let him go and have his fling, and all that nonsense. George!" she repeated bitterly; "as if anyone trusted to his judgment! If he gets his bag full of game, and gets

a number of men into the house for shooting, he is content. George! he will fume and scold one minute, and joke and laugh with Primrose the next. Oh, I am so sick of life!"

"I cannot bear to hear you say so!" I exclaimed. "You! the mistress of this beautiful house, with a kind husband and son, and all the world can give—"

"*Don't, Althea!*" Judith said vehemently. "I am a disappointed woman! Do you remember when Primrose said, 'After all, Althea will be the happiest of us three sisters'? How true was her prophecy!"

"She looks happy now," I said, as I went to the window and looked out on the large party on the terrace.

Primrose was still graceful and pretty; her fair hair was scarcely touched with grey, and her figure was youthful. She was walking daintily over the turf, and with the same serene smile as of old. How could women like my sister Primrose grow old? The deep joys and sorrows of life never touch them, and their faces escape the lines such strong emotions leave.

Faded my sister Primrose might be, on close inspection, but still young for her early half a century of years.

Her two youngest children were locked arm-in-arm with my twins, and St. John was behind with his cousin, on whose shoulder was borne our baby Stephen.

"That is a pretty family picture," I said. "I wish Oliffe were here to see it. Oh, Judith! there must be much that is good and kindly in Prim's nature."

"I don't say there is not!" Judith exclaimed; "but he does not give me the benefit of it. Althea, I have missed the best things of life by doing my utmost to grasp them; while you, who took everything with a good grace, you have all your heart can desire."

We were standing at the open window together, and the party below saw us.

"Do come out, mother! *Do* come!" Stella called; while Stephen from his elevation shouted:

"*Do come*, mumsie, 'cause I am four years old to-day." "Yes, aunt Althea, do come!" Then, from his elevation on Prim's shoulder, my Stephen began a long and very confused account of—"Come and see the place where fader pulled that *naughty* Prim out of the water when he was a little boy. And Prim says—"

"Prim says aunt Althea is to come out into the sunshine, and not mope in the house. We shan't have many more days like this. You come too, mother."

"No," Judith said; "I have letters to write. He does not want *me*," she added. "He cares a thousand times more for you."

Four little ponies, two white and two bay, had come round; and the Castle-Beamish's governess appeared, ready to accompany the four little girls for a ride. That is to say, they were to ride, and Miss Willoughby was to walk.

It never seemed to occur to my sister that the governess might be tired. She was paid to do her duty, and the question of what she liked, or did not like, never entered anyone's mind. My little girls were the only ones who seemed to think that Miss

Willoughby would have a long and weary expedition, following the ponies on foot. When I reached the group I heard Stella say:

"Miss Willoughby shall have a turn on my pony if she likes."

"Nonsense!" said one of her cousins. "She is never tired—are you, Willy?"

Miss Willoughby, a pale, delicate-looking girl, said wearily:

"Well, it makes very little difference whether I am tired or not."

St. John, who had disappeared, now came round in a low pony-chair, which had been used by poor Mr. Baldwin in his last days.

"I will drive Miss Willoughby in this," he said. "The old pony is not very swift, but it will be better than walking so far. *I* shall like it better, anyhow. Come, jump in, Miss Willoughby."

The poor girl hesitated, and glanced at my sister Primrose.

"Perhaps Lady Castle-Beamish would prefer my walking."

"Oh, I do not mind, if Mr. Allingham is so kind as to drive you, and if Mrs. Allingham does not object to it."

"No, indeed, I do not," I said. "I am so glad you thought of it, St. John."

St. John gave me a bright smile—we understood each other. And then the cavalcade moved off. The groom in attendance on the children on the little ponies.

Primrose looked after her children and mine, and said:

"I could give you the pattern of those pelisses which my children are wearing. Elise copied them from one which had been ordered for one of the French princesses."

Primrose's children were always dressed in the very extreme of fashion, and there were some people who thought that their external appearance was all that ever concerned their mother. And she continued with a little laugh, so like the Primrose of old:

"Aren't Stella's and Benvenuta's hoods rather old-fashioned?"

"They do well enough for a country walk," I said; "but I must not keep Prim waiting any longer, nor Stephen," who was growing vociferous with his "*Mum-sie, do come!*"

"It is very wet down by the river," Primrose said, with her languid smile. "Here is your nurse come to take Stephen for his morning sleep."

Stephen had set up a loud cry, and, kicking his feet out from his cousin's shoulder, declared he *would* go to the river with cousin Prim.

"Of course you shall!" said Prim, tearing off with the child still on his shoulders. "No one will catch the old horse."

My sister Primrose turned into the house, saying:

"What a spirit the boy has!" while Judith's voice was heard from the window above:

"It is just like Prim to make him disobedient."

I had some trouble to overtake my boy; but I told my nurse to follow me, and called to Prim to stop. He obeyed, laughing; but my Stephen did not laugh.

"He is but a baby, pray let him have his own way," my nephew said.

"Put him down, please, Primrose, and nurse will take him back to the house. He will not be fit for his tea-party if he does not get his morning's nap. Now, Stephen," I continued, "go back with nurse."

Stephen stamped his foot as his cousin landed him on terra firma, but he did not cry. Then I stooped down, and repeated:

"Go with nurse quietly, because mother wishes it, and because you love mother."

In an instant my boy's mood changed. His large eyes filled with tears; he held his rosy mouth up for a kiss, and without another word trudged away with nurse.

My nephew and I walked on towards the well-remembered path by the river.

There are some November days which are like June, in their soft, balmy air and bright sunshine, and this day was one.

The branches of the trees nearly bare of russet leaves, the silence and the hush of nature, only told that autumn had passed into winter, and that these days were but the herald of storms and cold blasts.

"Well, aunt Althea, has my mother been grumbling about me as usual? Really, she is too provoking."

I put my hand within his arm.

"Primrose," I said, "many years ago I walked along this path——"

"I know—when uncle Oliffe saved my life," he interrupted. "Perhaps it would have been a good thing if he had let me drown."

"I was not thinking of that time, but of a time further back, when there was a fine noble-spirited boy fishing in the stream as I passed along here one morn-

ing. This boy's spirit was then untamed—he resented control; he loved to follow his own devices; he hated those who were set over him. But he learned to curb his fiery temper, to subdue his will, and fought a gallant fight against foes harder to conquer than the French before Dunkirk."

"Ah! you are talking of uncle Olliffe; but, aunt Althea, the case is quite a different one. My mother is so unreasonable. Had I not far better go out to look after the estates, and show myself a friend to the emancipation of the poor niggers, than go about town and fall into the traps and snares laid there by old men for young ones?"

"But, Primrose," I said, "why *must* you go about town?"

"Why, because every fellow who is heir to a title and a place like Allingham Park is sought after, just for what folks can get out of them, and so, it seems, for the mere pleasure of making them as bad as the worst people in high places."

All this was, alas! too true. The young men in the higher rank of life had all these temptations, and were insensibly influenced by the conduct of the Regent and his friends.

I have been writing of my own little circle of home, and I have not touched upon the condition of the great world, of which we in the immediate neighbourhood of Windsor and Claremont could not fail to be well informed—too well informed, alas! for the painful dissensions between the Prince Regent and his unhappy wife; his cruelty, and her eccentricity—all seemed to be brought near us in that part of the country.

At this time we were all thinking of the Princess Charlotte, who so soon expected to be a mother. Her troubles had been so heavy, her life so sad—and now she was the happy and dearly-loved wife of Prince Leopold.

We had all seen her fair bright face radiant with smiles, as she acknowledged our respectful greetings during the past summer, when we chanced to pass her in our drives. We all loved her; and my little girls always called her "Our dear Princess Charlotte."

"If you wish to see what misery uncontrolled passions bring in their train," I said, "you have only to look at the people in high places of whom you speak. And if you wish to see what an atmosphere of home happiness can do, look at the household at Claremont, and see how beautiful is the pure affection which reigns there, as it is reflected in the face of the young Princess."

"Yes; but they thwart me in my wishes in *that* direction, and so I shall go my own way."

Primrose tried to seem indifferent. I pressed my hand upon his arm more firmly.

"Do not go and leave your father and mother," I pleaded. "Stay here; learn to know your people, and promote their good. Do not leave us, Primrose. You come next to St. John in my heart's love. Do not leave us."

"Well, I will try, for your sake, aunt Althea; but I cannot put up with many more rows. As soon as you are gone the house will be filled for pheasant-shooting; and then there will be drinking, and everyone's temper will get hot, and my mother will cry and moan,

and my father will swear at me; and then—why, then I shall be off and try what a little absence will do."

"Dear Primrose," I urged, "be a man, and not a coward."

He winced a little.

"I am not a coward," he said; "no one can lay that to my door. They won't buy me a commission; but if there were only a chance of fighting, I would have one!"

"It is not that sort of fighting I mean, dear Primrose; it is a harder fight—against the giant that does struggle to overcome us—Self! Face the foe in God's strength, and prevail."

"Well," he said, with a winning tenderness of tone, "I'll try for your sake. I should hate to get so bad that you wouldn't speak to me; or so bad that you would not let me come near Stella and Benvenuta, and good old St. John. That *would* be a bitter pill to swallow!"

I longed to ask who it was he loved, when he suddenly exclaimed:

"There's a horse galloping up the drive! Who is it?"

The horse's hoofs rang on the hard road of the Park, and there was the suggestion of urgent speed in the very sound.

We turned quickly from the path across the pleasure-ground to the terrace; and just as we came in sight of the house we saw a messenger fling himself from his panting horse, and two of the servants run out to meet him.

"For Lord Allingham," he said; "from Colonel Allingham."

Then, as George, sauntering from the belt of plantation, was met by one of his men, I, hearing Oliffe's name as the sender of the despatch, said:

"What is it? Pray tell me."

George uttered an exclamation of dismay, saying:
"The Princess Charlotte is dead!"

Judith came into the hall; even Primrose was seen gliding down the wide staircase; the servants crowded round, for this was a common grief; and George read aloud from the paper he held in his hand:

"The Princess was confined at nine o'clock last evening, and died at two o'clock this morning. The child—a boy—was born dead."

What a moment was that for the people of England! At this distance of time those who do not remember it as an actual experience, can but dimly imagine the thrill of sorrow and fear which the news sent through every heart.

So many hopes had been set upon the fair young Princess; so many had, like myself, rejoiced when the sad clouds of her girlhood, caused by the miserable disunion of her father and her unhappy mother, were dispelled, and she was, as she herself said when dying, "The happiest wife in the kingdom."

The blow came with a double force, and it is no exaggeration to say tears fell like rain, and that a whole nation bowed its head to mourn.

Thus was my little Stephen's fourth birthday marked for ever in our memory as a day of mourning for the young wife who had not been allowed to taste the joy of motherhood, but whose cup of earthly happiness had been dashed from her lips.

When the children returned from their ride, the

news seemed to fill them with sorrow. Especially do I remember my Stella's face of consternation as she said:

"Dead! Oh, mother, I am glad the motherless baby is gone too!"

Thus was our dear Stephen's tea-party very different from what we had planned; and Oliffe did not return for it. We did not see him till the next day, when we all went back to the Croft together.

There were, as might be expected, many rumours afloat; but there could be no reasonable doubt that the doctors had lost their presence of mind, and that the dear Princess was injudiciously treated.

Her unhappy father, who was always emotional, was greatly overwhelmed when the news was taken to Carlton House on the morning of the fourth of November, and he had thrown himself in an agony of grief into the arms of the Duke of York. The poor stricken husband, Prince Leopold, seems to have been heart-broken, but he gave way to no violence of angry grief or bitter reproaches against the doctor.

But poor Dr. Croft never recovered his prestige as an accoucheur, and was loaded with abuse—whether wholly merited or not, I cannot determine. He was some months after attending a lady who was in danger; he became terribly excited and beside himself with fear, so that he shot himself with a pistol he found in the room he occupied.

This was really one of the most pathetic events connected with a great sorrow which touched a whole nation.

As we lived at Windsor we were naturally within reach of all news concerning the royal family. What

a melancholy picture was presented! The poor King, unconscious of joy and sorrow alike, lingering on; the Prince Regent's heart full of remorse and bitterness; the mother of the lost Princess banished from the family, and only officially informed of the crushing calamity. There was no heir-apparent to the crown, for the Royal Dukes, the King's other sons, had no children.

The prospect was gloomy indeed, and the cloud which hung over the royal family seemed to overshadow the whole country.

Sometimes during the next few months, when feeling that sense of home happiness I have described, I have almost feared that I, too, like the dear Princess, might say I was too happy for this changing world.

Our married life had been up to this point singularly free from anxiety. I wondered afterwards that I did not even then see the cloud, like a man's hand, which was on my horizon. But I had a strange security that as things were, so they would continue to be—and I was at rest. I think God gave me a full measure, pressed down, for those happy years, and that I was braced for the time that was coming. Seven years—nay, more than twice seven years—of plenty were granted me, in which I laid up my store for the days of dearth and barrenness.

The new year of 1818 was marked for our family by the abrupt departure of Primrose Allingham. George brought the news to us himself, and said that Judith and her son had parted in anger; and that for his part he was sick of the constant wrangling and quarrelling, and that the young jackanapes was best out of the way.

"He bid nobody good-bye," George said, "but Mrs. Bean. He seems to have gone into her room the evening before and asked her to make him some hot punch, and give him some biscuits he liked as a child, to eat along with it. Bean says he was very affectionate to her, and kissed her, poor old woman! and told her he should come back one day when he had seen the world."

"And not a word to his mother?" I exclaimed; "nor to me?"

"No, not a word. Heigh-ho!" exclaimed George; "we Allinghams are a strange lot. It is no new thing for us to wander off; but this young scapegrace will be back soon enough, I'll warrant. What's wrong with your boy, Althea?"

"Wrong with my boy!" I exclaimed. "Which boy?"

"Why, St. John is more like a shadow than flesh and blood; he looks as if he wanted a pipe of old port. I say, you know everything in the Park is yours if you want it. I'll order some of the best port and madeira to be sent down. Don't be offended," he said, mistaking my grave looks; "there's no port in the kingdom like that in our cellar."

"But do you think," I began, "St. John looks ill?"

"Pretty bad," was the reply. "Come and see Judith, will you, and comfort her? You are a prime hand at consolation, you know; and she will have nothing to do with me."

"Yes, I will come; and write her a little note to send by you, if you will take it. You will wait till Oliffe comes home?"

"No, no! I am restless, like others of my race. I feel as if I could walk to the ends of the world to

find that young——” George's voice faltered. Then he went on: “We have made a mistake with him, Althea. We have missed the mark somehow, and now we have lost him.”

“He will come back,” I said; “I am sure he will. Primrose has really good feelings. But oh, I am so sorry for you!”

I left him to write my little note to poor Judith; and while I was doing this a letter was brought in. It was from my nephew Primrose; it had no date, nor did it give us any clue as to whither he was gone:

“This is to bid you my adieux, aunt Althea. You have been vastly good and kind to me, and if I never come back, remember, I am glad your son should take my place, and be heir of Allingham. If you ask me why I go, I say I feel like a man escaping from a furnace for his life; and I know by going I am doing good at least to *one* person. I was not strong enough to fight against temptations, so I leave them behind me. Anyhow, no place and no people can be as bad as London is now for young men supposed to have a lot of money and a title in prospect. I dare not bid my poor mother good-bye; you can do it for me, and tell her I love her, but she will be happier without me. My good father has only been too good to me. They have shut me out from the only thing that could have saved me, and they must take the consequences.

“P. A.”

That was all. I ran downstairs with the letter to my brother-in-law, and left it in his hands to show to Judith. He took it with my own note, and putting

them into his pocket, he was leaving the room, when suddenly he returned, took my hand, pressed his lips upon it, and saying "Come and see your sister soon," he was gone.

The children were all out under the care of their daily governess, and I was glad to be alone. In the midst of all my concern about poor Primrose, and my fears that I might have done more for him, there was yet a more pressing anxiety, which George's words had called to life, about St. John, who by the circumstances of his delicate health, was so very much more with me than would have been possible had he been an Eton boy, or had he been able to join in the studies and amusements of boys of his own age. The love between us was strong with a strength which only mothers who have sons like him can understand. Such mothers, too, will know how an accepted delicacy of any child becomes, so to speak, an inevitable condition of things to which we become accustomed. We *know* that the thread on which we hold our treasure is a frail one; but we certainly never *realize* that it is wearing thinner and thinner day by day, and that it may break at any moment.

I was thinking over what George had said, and wondering whether Oliffe would think the fear well founded when I repeated it to him, when the sound of my Stella's voice, and the rush of her rapid feet upstairs, made me go to the door of the sitting-room to meet her.

"Mother! mother!" she exclaimed, "something has happened! Oh, mother!"

Benvenuta was now at my side, and less excitable in her manner, she said quietly:

"Little Stephen climbed a bench on the terrace of the castle, and——" I pressed my hand to my side, and Benvenuta hastened to say: "Stephen is not hurt, mother; it is not Stephen, but St. John, in trying to save him from rolling down the steep slippery turf, missed his own footing and fell, and——"

Now slow steps were heard, and other voices. Going to the head of the stairs, I saw, to my relief, my boy walking slowly up—but his handkerchief was held to his lips, and he was deathly pale—the governess and the servant behind, with Stephen in his arms. But I had eyes and ears for nothing but my boy. He let me lead him to his room, and then when he removed the handkerchief, I saw it was stained with crimson.

"It was a great shake, mother, and a sudden jolt, and then this came. What does it mean?"

Alas! I knew too well; and my heart sank within me.

My silence seemed to tell my boy what my lips could not utter; he fixed his wistful eyes on me, and then said, in a low, husky tone: "It will be hard to part, mother; but God knows best." And this was the keynote of the strength, wherewith St. John and I went together through the long, long months which followed, and I am thankful to remember that it never failed us.

"God knows best!" This, in my boy's simple faith, was no set phrase repeated with but little meaning to it, but it was the outcome of that trust in his Father's love which never deserted him.

We sought advice from the physicians best calculated to give it in a case like St. John's, and we were

strongly recommended to seek a warmer climate with soft sea air.

Olliffe and I were talking over this opinion of the doctors', and of the place which had been recommended—Sidmouth, in South Devonshire—when I said:

"It will mean separation from *you!*"

To my surprise, Olliffe said:

"No, I think not. I have served eighteen years in the War-office, and I think I shall resign my post there. We will all live quietly at Sidmouth together; and perhaps it may be good for some others as well as for St. John."

He looked earnestly at me, and then said quietly:

"I think it may be good for *me!*"

The words smote me with a sudden fear.

"Are you ill, Olliffe?" I asked.

"No, not ill; but you know the acute form of rheumatism from which I have suffered in earlier life has probably left some trace behind. I get an awkward pain in my chest and side when I am limping upstairs sometimes."

Oh! was the cloud no bigger than a man's hand about to swell in size and darken my heaven of bliss?

I did not speak. Any strong emotion always strikes me dumb; but my face must have showed what a throb of foreboding shot through my poor heart.

"My dearest," he said, "we have had many happy years together; let us not be ungrateful, and murmur and rebel against God's will."

"I could not live without you," I said, "and St. John."

"You *can* do all things through Christ who strengthens you," was the gentle but firm reply.

And then he began to talk cheerfully of his plans, and that he intended to precede us to Sidmouth to look for a house; and that we would leave the Croft to two of our faithful servants, the butler and his wife; and he added with a smile which was becoming increasingly beautiful:

"We shall have time to enjoy each other at Sidmouth—and how the children will delight in the sea-side!"

As the winter was advancing, there was no time to lose; and in the bustle of preparation and making arrangements, I lost the first sharp sense of fear; and, as so often happens, the trivial things of common life were useful, as they demanded attention, and took off my thoughts from the cause of all this change and unsettlement.

In the midst of my anxiety I could be thankful that I was not in the same condition as my sister Judith. Her proud spirit was terribly chafed by the inquiries which inquisitive neighbours made about her son—his sudden disappearance and its cause.

Then there was the mutual recrimination in which my sister and her husband indulged. Both had been equally to blame in their management of poor Primrose, and both laid the weight of responsibility on the other.

Judith and her husband were a melancholy spectacle of that saddest of all sad conditions, a married life, which, as age draws on, ceases to be anything but a name. They cared nothing for each other's companionship; and indeed, in their brighter and earlier days I do not think they knew what that close and intimate companionship meant.

George was proud of Judith's beauty, and her knowledge of the world, and her admirable qualifications as a hostess. He was pleased to hear her admired by those in high places; and when Romney painted her portrait and mine, I well remember how he looked with evident satisfaction "on this picture and on that."

Mine was painted before the sweetest joys of my life came to me, at the close of the last century; and I can recall even now the quick contradiction George gave when the picture was on view at an exhibition, and a man who was a comparative stranger joined us, and said:

"Is this Lady Allingham's portrait?"

"No, indeed," George said; "Lady Allingham is not like her sister. Let me introduce you to the original of the portrait you are admiring—my sister-in-law, Miss Allingham."

I can recall the very tone of his voice, as he added:

"When I present you to Lady Allingham, you will see there is no likeness."

The gentleman murmured something flattering which I could hardly hear, and George said:

"You must dine and sup with us to-morrow, and then I will show you not only my wife's portrait, but herself."

My poor portrait! It never won much praise except for the execution, which was in Romney's best manner.

But mere admiration will not suffice to keep the marriage bond perfect and complete. It always had grieved me to notice how my sister and her husband gradually drifted apart; and now in this sorrow, which

ought to have been borne *together*, each felt its bitterness, and turned from, instead of towards each other for comfort.

It was, indeed, little I could give; but at Judith's request I spent a day or two alone with her before I started for Sidmouth.

There was something inexpressibly melancholy in that stately house where silence reigned. The large reception-rooms were unused, and the chief desire of the once proud and beautiful mistress of Altingham Park was to hide her sorrow from the world, so impatient was she of any comments made by neighbours and friends! Poor George wandered aimlessly about the grounds; and in the short winter days there was nothing for a man like him to do but sit over his wine after dinner and read the sporting papers, going to bed at last heavy and sleepy at an early hour.

He was always kind to me; and the evening before I bid them good-bye, he asked me to come into his study, and kicking the great log of wood on the hearth with his heel, he said "he would give up home-comforts and take Judith a foreign tour if she would go."

I caught at the proposal as the most desirable thing, and said I would do my best to persuade Judith to consent to it.

"It is a miserable life here," George said; "and I should like to cut it short. You know, Althea, I—I loved that boy."

"I know you did!" I exclaimed.

"And yet his mother talks as if I had nothing to do with him except—except work his ruin. It is hard enough to have that cast in my teeth," he said,

with another kick at the log on the hearth. "Why, look here!" and then George opened a door which led to a small inner room. Here were cues and fishing-rods of all sizes arranged on the walls; a portrait of Primrose when he was the handsome spoiled boy Oliffe had rescued from drowning; and some books on a shelf which belonged to the lost son. "I keep these things here, and come and have a look sometimes. Now listen to me, Althea. If I am dead when he comes back, mind you tell the boy, whatever his mother may say, I loved him; and just tell him I hope he will bear me no ill-will—will you?"

I put my hand into George's, and pressed it with silent sympathy. I felt at that moment what a wide gulf lay between my cares and fears about my dearest ones—and a trouble like this.

Oh! you who read my story, and know what the loss of those you love best on earth means, thank God if He has spared you the sorrow which is worse, far worse than death—a loveless deserted home; a marriage which is but a shadow; a child who is lost to you by a separation worse than death! Thank God if you have only to bear a grief for which you can seek for sympathy from those who are around you, not a grief which you must hide in the depths of your heart, and can scarcely find courage to give it words.

If any such read my story, let me pray them to remember that there is a balm even for these hidden griefs; that for bitter self-reproach, which surges like the fretting restless waves against the sunk rock, there is a Voice that can speak peace; that there is One who will lift all burdens, if taken to the foot of His Cross; that for all tears there is a promise that they

shall be wiped from all faces; when entrance is given her whom sorrow has purified, through the gates into the City.

CHAPTER XII.

BY THE SOUTHERN SEA.

We had a very pleasant abode at Sidmouth; not on a level with the sea, but a little out of the town, or village, for it was scarcely more than a village in those days.

The soft sea breezes were most beneficial to my dear St. John, and we got through the winter of 1818 without any return of the grave symptoms which had so much alarmed us.

I can look back to that first year in Devonshire as a bright and happy one; and the children were so well and joyous in what was to them a new life, that we were all infected by their happiness; and the sky seemed to have cleared again after the threatened storm.

Just after we had settled at Sidmouth I had a letter from Miss Willoughby, my sister Lady Castle-Beamish's governess, asking me if I could find her a situation. It was a very humble and pathetic little letter, and touched me deeply. Stella and Benvenuta had been taught by myself and Oliffe, with the help of a daily governess who lived at Windsor. It was not possible for her to leave her family and accompany us to Sidmouth, therefore we were at this time without a governess. Miss Willoughby's application seemed to come at the right time, and I wrote to my sister Primrose, and asked her if she had any real

ground of complaint against her. The reply was that Miss Willoughby had *rather forgotten* her place, and that it would not be expedient for her to be too familiar with her elder daughters, therefore she had given her notice!

"The old tradition," Oliffe said, laughing; "just what you might expect from one of the little Miss Allinghams—eh, Althea?"

"Yes," I replied; "I think I shall engage Miss Willoughby, if only to show her that governesses are considered as the same flesh and blood as those whose children they teach."

"The only thing," Oliffe said, "to consider, is whether Miss Willoughby will be strong enough to manage Stella and Stephen. They both want a firm hand."

"Yes," I said, "but they are very good children, and easily managed."

"By you, I grant," my husband said; "but I do not feel too sure about Miss Willoughby. However, let us try her."

I only wanted Oliffe's permission, and wrote at once to Primrose to say that I would engage Miss Willoughby to come to us. How thankful I may be I made that decision, and how true and loyal was the friend I welcomed at Sidmouth after a long and tiring journey by the Exeter coach a few days before Christmas!

It was painful to me to see how shrinking and timid our new governess was at first. She seemed unable to believe we wished to treat her as any other gentlewoman, and that her meals were to be taken with us and the children.

She had been isolated at Sorleigh and Abbotsholme in two rooms—her bedroom and the school-room. She seemed to think Stella and Benvenuta would not be allowed to make her their companion, and it was only by degrees that the real nature of the girl appeared. She had been, poor child, crushed by adversity, and chilled by coldness, and now the warmth of a little ordinary kindness and friendliness brought out all her best qualities. She reminded me of a plant which had been hidden in the cellar, and had neither colour nor brightness till brought out into the light of day, when all its vitality and beauty comes forth under the influences of sunshine and air.

Miss Willoughby was at this time only twenty-four, and my sister's situation had been her first. Hers was the common story of the sudden death of the father leaving the children, who had been brought up in comparative affluence, unprovided for. She had received an excellent education, and was more fitted to teach than hundreds in these circumstances have proved to be.

As the spring, the beautiful spring, came on, we took many pleasure excursions in the neighbourhood, and were out a great deal on the sea. St. John always seemed better for these boating excursions, and fair and lovely was that beautiful coast of South Devonshire as seen from the water. Lofty cliffs skirted the bay to the right, and swept round to the long line where Lyme Regis and Bier lay hid.

In the other direction the coast-line was diversified by the mouth of the Exe, where Exmouth stood; and farther the small fishing village of Dawlish, and Torquay, at that time but little known. Then we

had donkeys for inland expeditions; and from the highest point of the lofty cliffs there was a view of the Dartmouth range of mountains, crowned with rugged tors, which, seen against the sky of evening, were indeed beautiful.

I have never been beyond the shores of my native country, but I cannot imagine that any scenery can give more real pleasure than the quiet coast and inland beauty of many parts of England.

Judith's letters were sad, and what she saw in her travels seemed to do but little for "a mind diseased." Her hungry longing to see her son once more seemed to grow in intensity, and till that was gratified she seemed unable to find any comfort.

We were all seated on the pebbly beach one lovely August afternoon of this year, when a letter from Judith was brought to me by Oliffe, who had gone to the post-office for the bag. It bore the postmark Geneva.

It was a sad letter, and I said to St. John, who was lying reading by my side, that I feared, unless some tidings came of Primrose soon, Judith would lose her senses.

"It is so horribly selfish of him!" St. John said. "He must know that his mother is tormenting herself; and I cannot understand it."

"If he had gone to Barbadoes, or any part of the West Indies, we should have known by this time, as your uncle George had every inquiry made of the agents of the estates."

"Mother," St. John said, "something has come into my head lately about Primrose, which may be fancy, or may not be. Shall I tell you?"

"Yes," I said, "do tell me!"

"You know he said in his letter to you that he went away to escape from temptation, and that he knew his absence would do good to *one* person. Well, I think that person is Miss Willoughby."

I was filled with astonishment; and yet, when I remember my sister's words, that "Miss Willoughby had forgotten her place, and become too familiar," the whole thing flashed upon me, and I determined to make some effort to find out if St. John's suspicion were well founded.

Agnes Willoughby was one of those gentle people who have an underlying strength of purpose, which, when called forth by circumstances, often surprises those who see it. As St. John and I were talking about her, she was standing close to the sea, making a deep trench, which Stephen called his moat, which the little summer waves filled as they ran up to the place and then receded again.

My boy was screaming with delight, and brandishing his wooden spade, while Stella and Benvenuta were heaping up stones in the centre of Stephen's castle.

"There ought to be frogs," St. John called out. "The frogs always croaked all night in the moat round the old baron's castle, and the poor slaves had to sit up all night to beat them off, for fear their lords should be kept awake."

The girls heard St. John's historical allusion, but Stephen did not; nor would he have appreciated it if he had done so.

"Let us go and collect some crabs on the rocks," Stella said. "They will do for make-believe frogs."

They scampered off, and Stephen and Miss Willoughby were left alone.

Then St. John got up, and going to the castle, from which the water of the ebbing tide was receding, said kindly:

"Go and rest by my mother, Miss Willoughby, and I will take care of Stephen."

I saw the kind intention at once, and calling Miss Willoughby, I said;

"Yes, come and rest by me; you must be tired."

"I enjoy playing with the children. I almost feel as if I were a child again," she said, as she let herself down on the bank of shingle at my side. Then suddenly she said:

"I am so happy with you—quite happy! You are so good to me!"

"I am very glad you feel at home with us," I said.

"It is such a contrast to my life since my father died. I had no notion, till I tried, that it could be considered to be a degradation to teach and take care of children, and earn an honourable living by it."

"I hope," I said, "that idea will soon be stamped out everywhere."

Agnes Willoughby shook her head.

"Lady Castle-Beamish's is not the only house where a governess is looked upon as an upper servant, and not treated as kindly. And if anyone does show her kindness, then trouble comes of it."

"Did anyone show you kindness?"

The brightest colour came into Agnes Willoughby's face, as she said:

"Yes, several people. Mr. St. John was one—the day he saved me from tramping after the four ponies and the groom."

"Ah, I remember that! And was there anyone else?"

And now the colour faded from her face, her lips trembled, and she said:

"I do not know whether I ought to tell you. I have tried to do what is right."

"I am sure you have," I said.

"Mr. Allingham, Lord Allingham's son, told me he loved me, and came to Sorleigh last November, and urged me to marry him secretly, and go away with him. He had paid me many attentions during that visit, but never in public—he was so afraid of Lady Allingham. I really tried to avoid him. I tried to tell him he must not think of marrying a poor governess, and that he must forget me."

"Did you love him?" I asked.

The sweet earnest face was turned to me as she said firmly:

"I did—and I do. I could not help it. I had been so desolate—so sad. No one cared about me. If the children showed fondness for me, they were instantly reprimanded; and I was made to feel that I must not step over the boundary-line which separated us. That is why Mr. Allingham never showed any signs of caring for me; and till he came to Sorleigh no one suspected it. It is very wonderful, I know; I, a poor governess!"

"The only thing I disapprove in the matter," I said, "is the want of candour. Primrose had no right to steal away your affections; and then——"

"Oh, do not say so!" Agnes Willoughby exclaimed; "dear madam, do not say so! He was so afraid of offending his mother, and making matters worse between them. He dared not tell her."

"And yet he proposed to marry you without the knowledge or permission of his parents," I said. "He is much to blame. Have you any idea where my nephew is?"

"It is but an idea," the poor girl said, with some hesitation; "for I have had no direct communication with him; but I think he is gone to Russia."

"To Russia!" I exclaimed.

"I am not sure; but there was a very rich merchant who promised him a post there in an office. It was that proposition which made him ask me to go with him. He said he should have enough, and more than enough, to live upon."

"I think I must give his parents this hint of where it is possible he may be. Have you heard from him?"

"Only once. The letter was written at the same time he wrote to you; it had no address. Oh!" she said, with a sigh of relief, "I am so glad you have asked me this, and that I have told you. He would not mind your knowing it, he loves you so dearly."

"He has taken a strange way of showing his affection," I replied; "but he has had many disadvantages."

And now we saw Oliffe coming towards us, and St. John returning with Stephen; while Stella and Benvenuta had at least a dozen crabs in their pocket-handkerchiefs, tied up by the four corners.

"I have just heard a piece of news," Oliffe said.

"The Duke of Kent has taken the Glen at the farther end of the village, and the servants are expected tomorrow, to put the place in order for the Duke and Duchess and the little Princess Victoria.

It was indeed great news for the people of Sidmouth, and as we went towards home everyone was talking of it. Weymouth was well used to the visits of royalty, and the Regent was continually at Bright-helmstone; but little Sidmouth was elated with the honour of receiving the Duke and Duchess of Kent and their infant daughter.

To us who lived in the near neighbourhood of royal residences, the arrival of the Duke of Kent was not such a great event. At the same time, my little daughters were full of eager anxiety to see the baby Princess, who might perhaps one day be Queen of England.

The Duke and Duchess did not desire to have any public demonstration, and the day of their arrival was kept uncertain for that reason.

Autumn was well advanced before the royal party were actually settled in their house. Covered with climbing plants which shadow the verandah, the residence was really scarcely more than a cottage. It stood back from the sea, and the approach was by a drive of about a quarter of a mile, shaded by trees, and skirting a sloping belt of turf, at the bottom of which a little stream ran to meet the sea. The ground rose on one side of the house, and on this a large bay-window opened, also sheltered by a verandah, the light pillars which supported the roof being entwined with honeysuckle and roses.

The little Princess was carried by her attendants

in the grounds for her daily airing, and Stella and Benvenuta would watch at the gate with deep interest.

The crown of England was in the future for the baby brow; but it was not then a certain prospect, as it became a few years later. The Duke of Kent was the fourth son of George III., and therefore there was yet the probability of the elder sons of the Royal family having children.

In this year, 1819, the Duchess of Clarence—afterwards the much-beloved Queen Adelaide—had a little daughter, who was named Charlotte, in memory of the lost Princess; but she lived a very short time. And in the following year another little Princess, who was baptized Elizabeth, was born; and had she lived, she would have been nearer to the throne than the little Princess Alexandrina Victoria, who was now such a constant source of interest to my children.

She was a very fair and lovely baby, and there was, even in her infant days, a charm about her which has never left our gracious Queen. The clear frank glance of her large blue eyes, and the sweet but firm expression of her mouth, were really remarkable, even when a baby of eight months old. I can recall her then, just as the New Year of 1820 had dawned. We were all returning from an excursion in the bright sunshine of the January noon, when we saw the royal party crossing the road just before us with their attendants.

The Duke and Duchess were linked arm-in-arm, and the little Princess, in her white swan's-down hood and pelisse, was holding out her hand to her father.

I can see now the smile on her rosy face, and the delighted out-stretched arms of her father, as he took her from the lady's arm who was her nurse.

We all waited, drawn up in a line, Stephen on a donkey, and the rest on foot. My husband and St. John uncovered, of course, and Stephen tugged at his hat-strings, for the little boys of his age in those days wore strings to their beaver-hats, and were altogether dressed in a cumbrous fashion, now happily exploded. My two girls and I curtseyed respectfully, and Stella exclaimed:

"What a beautiful baby!"

The Duchess, hearing Stella's words, turned round with a pleasant smile, and said:

"Would you like to kiss the baby?"

Stella coloured with delight, and looked at me for permission.

The Duke kindly held the little Princess down towards Stella, and said:

"I am glad my little May-blossom finds favour in your eyes."

Then a shout was heard from the donkey, where Stephen sat.

"Me too, please, Duke."

Instead of being in the least shocked with my boy's freedom, the Duke laughed, and saying:

"Dismount, then."

Stephen scrambled down, and coming up, received the longed-for kiss.

*"Father calls Stella and Benvenuta *his* May-blossoms,"* Stephen volunteered.

"And you may be proud of them," the Duke said, as he gave the Princess back into her nurse's arms;

and the Duchess, with repeated bows and smiles, passed on.

"That is a fine fellow," the Duke said, lingering a little; "you must make a soldier of him. What is your name, my little fellow?"

"Stephen Allingham."

"Allingham—Allingham! Why, I know that name, sure! I know that name! A fine officer was wounded before Dunkirk, when my brother, the Duke of York, suffered such heavy losses."

Oliffe bowed, and said:

"Yes, your Grace; here is the sign that I was amongst the wounded;" and he pointed to his knee.

"Dear, dear! Well, let me see more of you, Colonel Allingham. Are you residing here?"

"For my son's health, your Grace; and we find the climate salubrious."

"Yes, yes; but for all that there is a treacherous wind from inland; it is blowing to-day. Let me see something of you, Colonel Allingham; and the Duchess will, I know, be pleased to see your lady and her May-blossoms;" and then, with a wave of his hand, the Duke walked away up the drive.

We had paid our formal respects to the Duke, but hearing that he desired privacy, we had not intruded further than by leaving our cards.

The very next day Oliffe and I received a card conveying a command from H.R.H. the Duke and Duchess of Kent that we would dine with them at the hour of six on the day but one following. Such a command could, of course, not be set aside; and we were preparing to start in the carriage at the hour ap-

pointed, when a groom wearing the Duke's livery rode up, bearing a second card.

"His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent is suffering from a severe cold, and there will be no reception of guests this day."

Little did we, or anyone suppose that this announcement was the first note of warning as to what was to come. Every day the condition of the Duke grew more serious, and in the dim light of the January morning the tolling bell of the old parish church told a sorrow-stricken village that the Duke was dead.

So was the fair future clouded—so was the happy home of domestic joy broken up! The stricken Duchess lived only for her child, and, as we know, came out of her grief and desolation to be the wisest as well as the tenderest of mothers to the future Queen of England.

This sorrow was but the beginning of trouble, public and private. Scarcely a week later, and the poor blind old King, the father of the Duke, passed from the dim shadows of his earthly prison-house into the light of the inheritance incorruptible which fadeth not away.

The Duke of York only was with him at the end; and the Prince Regent, who had long been virtually King, was absent, being seriously ill himself at Brighton.

Indeed, for some days there were many reports current that the Regent was likely to follow his father and his brother, and never wear the crown of England. The whole country, from this time till death ended the painful and bitter controversy, was literally

convulsed with the strange and almost unprecedented position of the King, George IV., and his unhappy Queen.

It is needless for me to enter into any details of that long struggle, and perhaps no woman in the kingdom was so much removed from the keen partisanship which may be said, split the people into two parties, for and against the rights of Queen Caroline.

My sympathies were naturally drawn out to the widowed Duchess, in whose grief I was, alas! so soon to enter by that door which only experience can open. Till the staff on which we lean is removed, we can never, never really feel for others, who are left alone to fight the battle of life for their children's sake.

We may be hard on what we are pleased to call selfish and exclusive grief till we are ourselves pierced by the arrow from the same quiver. Then, and then only, can we measure the depths through which we have seen some stricken one all but engulfed, and have wondered. We wonder no more when, in the agony of our own soul, we cry, "All Thy billows and Thy storms have gone over me!"

The treacherous blast of which the Duke of Kent spoke that day had touched my dear St. John. He had a recurrence of the gravest symptoms, and was confined strictly to two rooms. It was now that I felt the comfort of Agnes Willoughby's presence. I could not have been so constantly with my boy if I had not had her help with my girls and Stephen.

Oliffe had been obliged to go to Windsor to arrange some business matters, and to see the steward of the Allingham estates. I told myself that in the

spring St. John would revive again. I tried to flatter myself into the belief that warm sunshine and soft sea breezes would again have their renovating influence. But though I hoped against hope, there were moments when I could not hide from myself that my boy was growing perceptibly weaker.

I was with him one calm bright evening when the low sun was colouring everything with intense beauty, when the servant brought in a large packet of letters.

"From father," St. John said. "I hope he is coming home soon."

"I hope so," I said, with a thrill of joy, as I saw my husband's writing.

"What a long letter, mother!" St. John said. "I am afraid he is not coming home. Do tell me!" he said, feverishly. "And oh! don't let Stephen come in—he does make such a racket!"

The tone was the querulous tone of sickness, and St. John knew it himself.

"I am very crabbed, dear mother," he said presently; and then I saw with a great effort he restrained himself from asking questions as to what was in his father's letter, with which I was soon engrossed.

It contained a sad story of poor Primrose Allingham. He had returned to the Park broken down and shattered, and found there no welcome, and no forgiveness. His parents were both absent, the house desolate; and if my husband had not been at hand, he would have been forlorn indeed.

Oliffe said he did not think Primrose would ever get better: he was in a high fever, and often delirious; and that he had confided to him his love for Agnes Willoughby, and his conviction that if his mother had

allowed him to win her for his wife, things would have been different. But on his return from Sorleigh, when he asked her to receive Agnes as her daughter, Judith's indignation knew no bounds; and in the hot anger and fierce temper displayed on both sides they had parted, "never, it may be," Oliffe added, "to meet again." "What grief that *we* can know, my dear love," he continued, "can be named with *this*? Our love is stronger than in youth; our children are bound to us and to each other by it. And if God is pleased to take away the light of our eyes, and our firstborn precedes us to the heavenly inheritance, we shall yet be able to say, 'Though He slay me, *yet* will I trust Him.'"

Oliffe went on to tell me that he had sent a special messenger to Naples, where George and Judith were passing the winter, and that he hoped that they might reach home in time to see their son.

"He is very much changed, and he says he is not good enough to ask poor Agnes Willoughby to come to him, though he continually calls for her. Indeed, I hardly know what to advise. I must leave this matter to you, my dear wife. It is plain that I cannot leave this poor fellow to die alone; and yet my heart misgives me that you may be needing my presence, as I see you tell me in your last letter that our boy is weaker. But I leave it in your hands, both as regards Miss Willoughby and yourself."

Was ever poor heart more torn with anguish than mine? It was as if a strong hand were pulling me in one direction, and yet I was bound in another. Which was my duty? Ought I to take Agnes Willoughby to Allingham to see for herself this poor returned pro-

digal, and to try to wake in his heart the faith in the forgiveness of his Father in heaven, and of his earthly parents?

I felt I must think, and I must pray, before I took a step in any direction. Thus I quietly folded the long letter, written on thick Bath post, and putting it in my pocket, bent over St. John, and said:

"Dear father's letter is a very long one, and I must think over it carefully before I tell you its contents. I will call Agnes Willoughby to sit with you, and return in half an hour."

"Is there bad news?" St. John asked.

"Not of father," I replied, as I bent over my boy; and he drew my head down to his face.

"Sweet mother!" he whispered, "I won't be impatient."

I dare not say more. I went to call Agnes Willoughby, and found her on the verandah, reading aloud to Stella and Benvenuta, while Stephen was quieter than usual, amusing himself with making cups and saucers with the acorns he had picked up in the woods that day. I paused a moment to look at Agnes Willoughby, and thought how little anyone would suspect that she had been the one love of a man like my nephew. She was so quiet and self-possessed; she had no particular beauty of face or form, and by the side of my blooming radiant girls she looked far past her first youth, and seen by their fresh roses her face seemed colourless. But I knew within there was a latent fire which I had seen kindled by the history of any deed of self-forgetfulness or heroism; and though I always avoided a recurrence to the subject of Primrose Allingham, I could never forget the earn-

estness with which she had said, in answer to my question:

"I *did* love him, and I *do!*"

She looked up from the book, one of Sir Walter Scott's novels, then the eagerly sought-for and healthful romances which stimulated the young and interested the old, and said:

"Are you not well, Mrs. Allingham?"

"I am not ill," I said; "but I think a little fresh air will do me good before sunset. Will you go and sit with St. John?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the girls, starting to their feet, "let us come with you, mother."

"I would rather not, darlings; I wish to be alone."

"Is St. John worse?" Stella asked quickly. "Is he, mother?"

"No, dear; he has had a comfortable day;" and then I escaped, and putting on my pelisse and bonnet, I set out on my solitary walk.

The evening was beautiful. The sun had set, but there was an afterglow in the west of every colour, from rose and amethyst to silver-grey. I went down the road to the beach, where all was quiet. The sea was perfectly calm, and the little waves made their sweet murmur on the shore. That low, monotonous music soothed me; and as it rose and fell, I seemed to hear the everlasting chime, and the voice of the sea took words and repeated what Oliffe had said to me in his letter:

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him! *Yet* will I trust Him! Yet—yet will I trust Him!"

As I stood there my voiceless prayer went up to God, and before I turned to go home, an answer of

peace seemed to be borne in on my soul: "And they that trust in the Lord shall renew their strength."

I retracted my steps homeward, in the stillness of all around, with a lighter heart. So true it is that if we cast our burden on God, the load seems lighter, and the way along which we bear it less toilsome.

All the deepest experiences of the soul are voiceless, we cannot give them words; and I have now come to that point in my life's journey of which I can, even now after many more years have passed, scarcely bring myself to write.

The day after that in which I received my husband's letter was spent in anxious consultation with Agnes Willoughby and my dear St. John. A kind friend whom we had known somewhat intimately at Sidmouth—a Mrs. Assheton—was taken into our confidence, and she offered to come and set me free to go to Allingham Park with Agnes, if she wished to do so; and St. John, instead of putting any obstacles in the way, as he might easily have done, tried to seem perfectly contented that I should leave him, saying, as he always did, that he was better, and that he should get on very well without me.

We had done our best to prevent my darling boy from becoming a selfish invalid, and his father had always tried to brace him for suffering, and show him the beauty of patient endurance. St. John's naturally sweet disposition was, I knew, a great help, but I have often thought since, when I have seen the invalid of the house almost tyrannical in the amount of attention he levies from those who love him, how different was our experience with St. John. He had

many occupations; one of his favourite was painting pictures of the moths and butterflies which his father and sisters caught for him. And so delicate was his touch that they would almost deceive those who saw them on the sheet of paper, so perfectly did they represent the original. Then my husband always read the Greek Testament with St. John, and thus made the study of the Word of God a double interest; and those hours were some of the happiest of these happy times.

We were talking over our plans with our friend Mrs. Assheton, and I was sitting at the writing-table finishing my letter to my husband, and proposing to come at the beginning of the next week with Agnes Willoughby, when a chaise with post-horses came up the drive, and pulled up at the door. A strange gentleman sprang out, and I heard his voice in the hall:

“Can I see Mrs. Allingham?”

I threw down my pen, and, fearing St. John might be frightened, hastened into the hall, and shut the drawing-room door behind me.

I suppose no evil tidings were ever really broken to those who have to hear them. I can only remember that I found myself in the dining-room with this stranger, who took my hand in his and led me to the sofa.

“What is it?” I asked. “Is—Primrose Allingham dead?”

“No; but I fear I have worse news for you.”

“*Worse* news?—my husband?” The stranger bowed his head. “Is he ill? Can I go to him at once—in that carriage? Are you come to take me?”

"There is no great haste necessary," he said.
"When you are equal to the journey, and can tell me
what are your wishes, we can start."

Then the whole truth came to me. A hand of ice seemed laid upon my heart; and I remembered nothing more till I found myself in my own room with my children round me, their sobs and tears recalling me to my life and my loss. No tears came to my relief. I came out of that unconsciousness to face what was before me—that I must go at once to Allingham Park, taking Agnes Willoughby with me.

The gentleman who had brought me the heavy tidings seemed kind and helpful. He was a Mr. Williams, one of the doctor's assistants who had been called in to Primrose, and who had been sleeping at Allingham Park since Oliffe had summoned medical help to his poor unhappy nephew.

Those who have gone through a frozen grief like mine will be able to understand how I moved about like a machine—bid my children good-bye, left instructions about my sick boy; and, tearless myself, clasped them all to my heart, in the tumultuous weeping which is the blessed relief God gives to the sorrows of childhood and youth.

"Oh, mother, mother!" Stella said passionately;
"do not look like that. Oh, mother!"

And I could reply quietly: "Darling, I must be calm. There is yet much to do."

Much to do! What would I not have given for something to do for *him*—some word, some parting sign of our undying love! Yet how blessed was the thought that in all these twenty years there had been no shadow between us, no separation of heart or in-

terest, no mistrust, no doubt! He was my staff on which I leaned; he was my early love refined and chastened; he was mine, with that glory of possession which makes the heart of a true wife sing for joy.

And was he not mine still? Nay, is he not mine now that the time of reunion is so near? I feel, now, the years that have been so long to me have been as a day to him, in the kingdom where he serves the Master he loved on earth. For "His servants shall serve Him" always fills me with thankfulness when I think of Oliffe. His bright, energetic, enthusiastic nature could not be *inactive*; but he must, I think, *rejoice* in the work of the far-off land—which is a work without weariness, and service which knows not heaviness.

We made out a quick journey, changing horses at the different posting-houses; and I lay back in my corner hardly conscious of the way I went. The young doctor was on the box-seat, and from time to time came to the window, when we stopped to change horses, with an offered refreshment, which I took mechanically from his hand. No companion could possibly have suited me better than Agnes Willoughby. Anyone who had spoken to me of my sorrow would have been intolerable. Then I knew her heart also was stricken and heavy within her. So we two poor women only clasped hands and endured, as the steady jog-trot of the horses kept up their monotonous tattoo on the roads, accompanied now and then by the crack of the post-boy's whip.

When we turned into the gates of Allingham Park, the morning sun of the November day was shining on

the slopes and glades so familiar to me. Through the leafless branches of the trees, where only a few sere leaves yet hung, I caught the shimmer of the stream—the happy, noisy, rushing little stream—so full of memories to me. The utterly neglected state of the place struck me—the silence—the desertion. No one met us at that door where I had often had such kindly, loving greetings in past days from my aunt Norah, and later from poor George Allingham.

As I reached the foot of the staircase, a tall gentleman met me. He was Dr. Prendergast, and he was suave and courteous—one of those doctors who take all death and sickness, if I may so express it, professionally. Their quick, keen sympathy is blunted by long habit, and the same story rehearsed continually before their eyes naturally loses something of its effect.

Dr. Prendergast offered me his arm, and we ascended the wide staircase together, poor Agnes Wiloughby following. I think as I turned at the top of the stairs, and looked at her, a pang of jealousy shot through me. What was her grief to mine, for she was not *too late!*

Dr. Prendergast led me to the old sitting-room, where I had first talked with my aunt Norah, the windows from which I had looked down on that happy party on the terrace, on the day when the news of Princess Charlotte's death had reached us on my Stephen's fourth birthday.

Was it all a dream? Was life all a dream, in its joys and brightness, and the only reality left—my sorrow-struck heart?

Presently slow, feeble steps were heard, and Mrs. Bean came in. Inexpressible was the comfort I felt,

as the dear old woman took my hand in hers and pressed kisses on it.

"Oh! dear Bean," I said, "tell me all."

"The poor dear boy is no better; it is a question if he lives till they get here."

Ah! she was thinking of Primrose—of course she was; and I—I was only thinking of Oliffe.

"He calls for Miss Willoughby day and night."

"Then take her to him," I said, "dear Bean, and leave me alone."

"You poor dear lady!" Bean said. "Ah, what a coming home it is for you! Dear Mr. Oliffe sat here in this room; and it was here——"

And now Dr. Prendergast interposed, and said he would take Miss Willoughby to see his patient, and return to me when I was sufficiently rested to see him.

"Yes," I said, "leave me alone—I like it best."

They did as I asked them, and I was left alone in the room where, as I gathered from Bean, my husband had died. His spirit was surely very near me. As I stood in dumb despair where they left me, my hand resting on the back of the easy-chair, I could almost believe he was present, and that it was he who directed me to the old-fashioned escritoire with its many drawers and its sliding desk, on which—oh, mingled joy and pain!—lay a letter in his handwriting, addressed to me. It was sealed with the ring he always wore—a ring which was given to him by a brother officer who lay with him in the hospital after the siege of Dunkirk, and who, when dying, bequeathed it to him, telling him to make the motto the motto of his life henceforth. The ring was a lapis lazuli, and on it was cut a plain cross, with this motto, '*Feramus.*'

How significant it was now! The letter was feebly written, and was one of those precious outpourings of tender love that no eye but mine must ever see. But from it I learned that my husband, after despatching that packet to me at Sidmouth, had a very severe attack of pain, so severe that he described it as agony. He said he felt sure that if it recurred he should die, and therefore he wrote me this farewell, lest we should meet on earth no more. Then came words of cheer, and the expression of "the sure and certain hope;" and commanding me to God, he left me and his children in His holy keeping.

I pressed the precious letter to my lips, and felt a strange sweet thrill of joy in my sorrow. After all, I had my parting word, and he knew how I loved him.

Dr. Prendergast returned, as he had said he would, and told me that Mr. Allingham was quieter, and that the presence of Miss Willoughby had soothed him.

"She is a person of great self-control," he said; "and in his forlorn and sad condition, one may be thankful she is come."

"Yes," I said. "Now will you tell me everything about my husband?"

"My young friend Mr. Williams was actually here at the time. I do not sleep at Allingham Park, but leave him in charge. Colonel Allingham had been constantly with the poor patient for several days and nights, and he had assisted us in lifting him, and in restraining him in his delirium. He had a very severe attack of pain, which by careful examination I take to be angina pectoris. I prescribed for him, and left him in this room when I took my leave for the night on Tuesday, enjoining perfect quiet, and instructing Mr.

Williams to look in on him in an hour or two, and recommend him to retire to bed. He did so about two o'clock a.m., and found Colonel Allingham, as he believed, asleep in that chair. The letter addressed to you in the escritoire, and—and—”

Dr. Prendergast's matter-of-fact account here suddenly stopped short. Something perhaps in my face arrested him; for he took some brandy from a flask, and held it to my lips. I drank it without opposition. I should have opposed nothing, whatever he had offered me. Then I rose and said:

“I wish to go to him.” There was a slight resistance on Dr. Prendergast's part, but I only repeated, “I wish to go to him;” and I went.

My husband lay in his last long sleep, like a tired child at rest. Nay, rather like a warrior who had fought a good fight and finished his course, and had gone to receive his crown. Inexpressibly beautiful was his face, in which was the light still lingering which is “never on land or sea.”

To look on death as I looked on it then, is to feel an assurance nothing can destroy that death from which Christ has taken the sting is but the entrance into life. Life and light, which, thanks be to God, the Gospel has brought to us who once lay in darkness and shadows, and are now guided into the way of peace. Into that peace, as I sat hour after hour in that hushed and silent room, I entered; and that peace has through the rest of my pilgrimage never been taken away.

BOOK IV.

"Yes, the pride of youth is gone;
We tread with holy fear,
We speak in lowlier tone,
For we know our God is near.

"The visions of youth depart,
But a voice, with 'Peace, be still,'
Gives the calm of a faithful heart,
The joy of a chastened will.

"Shaken by every shock,
Broken by every blast,
We fly to our home in the Rock,
And learn to be humble at last."

CHAPTER XIII.

MEMORIES.

1826. It would be difficult for me to write in any detail the story of my life, for some years after that life was entirely changed.

I came back, as we all must come back, to the daily routine appointed for me. I had my children to live for; and Oliffe's words were true, for God gave me strength.

My dear St. John, contrary to all expectation, lived for two years after his father was taken from me; and the constant care and nursing which he needed was the very best occupation that I could have found.

We held sweet communion together, and the far-off land whither my beloved had gone seemed brought

very near as our firstborn lingered so long upon the border, and often, as it were, hovered between two worlds.

But even here I had to guard against the selfishness of sorrow. Personally, I wanted nothing more than to be with St. John, and desired no intercourse with the outer world.

I was awake from my dream that my whole duty lay in St. John's room by overhearing a little conversation between Stella and Benvenuta.

"If only I could see mother smile again, and take some interest in what we do," Stella said. "When she does come out of St. John's room she is not like our bright happy mother of old times."

"We must be patient," Benvenuta said. "We must remember how much mother has lost. Dear father and she were more to each other than most husbands and wives."

The girls were on the verandah of our house at Sidmouth, and I was in the drawing-room. I felt self-reproached; and then I reckoned the time that had passed since I had lost Oliffe; it was nearly two years! Yes, it was natural my children should wish to have some brightness about them; and I remembered a prayer which Oliffe often used, taken from the primer of the dear little King Edward VI, asking that we might have *cheerful* hearts whensoever we are oppressed by any kind of adversity, whether sickness, or loss of friends, or any worldly disappointment.

I determined by God's grace to strive after a cheerful heart; and then the time could not be long, I thought, before I should meet my beloved again. Well do I remember the soft September day, with the golden

sunshine lying on sea and land, and I thought how year by year God's mercies and compassions failed not. Presently I heard another voice on the verandah, and my girls saying:

"Yes, mother is at home; but she does not see anyone. My eldest brother is a great invalid, and since our father died we have not had any visitors."

"Will you tell her I am here?—Mary Broughton."

I heard the name, and stepped out, to be folded in the arms of my early friend. So many years had passed since we parted, there was a thrill of pain in the joy of our meeting.

"Althea, dear Althea!" Mary said, as she led me back into the room, and my girls considerably left us together.

One glance was enough to show that she and I were both widows.

By degrees we told each other our life's story. Mary had worked with Geoffrey in a distant part of India. His life had been spent literally in God's work, and he died in harness. He was drowned in a rushing torrent, which he was trying to ford, that he might reach the dying bed of an old rajah who called for the Christian's God.

"A noble death," Mary said, with a smile, "crowning a noble life. I have returned to England, as my health is broken, and I could no longer carry on unassisted the work which, when shared, was so light. The native schools and the general mission work were too much for me alone." She faltered a little then, but went on: "I shall find work here, I do not doubt."

"Find it with me, Mary. Stay with me, and help me to brighten the children's lives. Just when you

came I was thinking that I had been selfish in my grief; resigned, but not cheerful, as Oliffe would have had me."

"Would *have* you to be," Mary said, with emphasis. "They are not lost, only gone before."

Mary Broughton stayed with me till the message came for my St. John.

It came at last so gently that we scarcely knew when his pure spirit had departed. A few moments before, a smile, which seemed to be the reflection of some heavenly joy, shone on his face, and he said, in a natural voice:

"Why, there is my father!"

We know nothing beyond the veil—so thin, and yet so strong—which separates the seen from the unseen; but I like to think my husband met our boy, and that they went in together to the heavenly city.

I clung to Sidmouth, where I had held my last earthly intercourse with my dear ones who were gone. And here for another year I lived in retirement, comforted by the presence of my early friend, and looking steadily to the duty which lay before me—of returning to the Croft and bringing my daughters out in the station of life to which it had pleased God to call them.

Stephen's education also must now be carried on in good earnest; and in the spring of the next year I went to Windsor, to superintend the necessary preparations for our return. Two faithful servants, a man and a woman, had taken care of the house during our long absence; but a great deal of papering and painting was necessary to make everything look fresh and bright.

At Stella's earnest request I allowed her to be my companion; and when I saw her eager delight with all she saw, and her pleasure at the proposed change, I felt more than ever that I had perhaps too long delayed it.

"We shall go to Allingham Park, mother," Stella said. "I wish you had stayed there, as uncle George asked you; but—— Oh! I forgot, dear mother!" and Stella pressed close to me in the postchaise in which we were travelling.

"Do you think poor uncle George and aunt Judith will be glad to have us at the Croft again, mother?" was the next question. "It is rather sad for them to think that they have no heir, and that Stephen will inherit! Can you fancy Stephen Lord Allingham?"

"Do not talk about it to him, Stella; it is better not."

"But he knows all about it, mother; and he says the boys at his tutor's at Sidbury always call him,—in fun, you know—'my lord.'"

"I am very sorry to hear it," I said; "and we must take care, Stella, to let Stephen know it is better to be good than to wear a coronet."

Stella was silent.

"I think I rather like to belong to what people call a noble family. Is it silly, mother?"

"I do not know that it is silly; but remembering my own childhood, and the absurd notions which were put into our heads by poor Pring and Bellamy, I do wish to guard my children from the same kind of thing."

"You speak of us all as children, mother; do you know we are nearly twenty? Our cousins have all been married before twenty, and Bennie and I have

seen no one. I know why, and I don't mind; only, of course it would be nice to have some fun."

It was so natural that I could not be vexed with Stella; but she suddenly threw her arms round me, saying:

"It is horrid of me to say this. Mother, do forgive me! Benvenuta does not care, but then she is so much better than I am. And I *should* like to go to Court, and see all the grand people, and the jewels flashing, and hear beautiful music, and everything that is nice. It is a pity there is no Queen, and that the King is not a good man. Fancy, if that dear sweet baby, Princess Victoria, is ever Queen, how delightful it will be! She *will* be Queen one day."

"Everything in this life is so uncertain," I replied; "who can tell who may succeed? In any case, the Duke of Clarence comes next after the King. And that is a great mercy, for the little Princess is only now four years old; and there would be a long Regency if she were the next heir to the throne."

It was a great trial to me to enter our old home—to see the familiar things, the unchanged condition of all outward circumstances, and I myself, Althea Allingham, so entirely another woman.

I stood before my own picture by Romney, and wondered—could this really represent me? The picture hung over Oliffe's writing-table, and there was the familiar Bible on it, which he always kept there; the paper-cutter, the letter-weight, and everything as he had last used it. I had ordered that nothing should be touched in his room, and my old servant had faithfully fulfilled her trust.

On the morning after our arrival I ordered a car-

riage, and went to pay my first sad visit to Allingham Park. It was a lovely day of early summer, and all things were full of rejoicing. Reclining in a chair on the well-known terrace I saw my sister Judith. She was now quite an invalid, and I do not know what would have become of her without the faithful care of Agnes Willoughby. I had alighted from the carriage at the chief entrance, and walked round to the terrace. Agnes was seated on a camp-stool, reading aloud, but at the sound of my footsteps she turned, and seeing me rose quietly, and kissed me. The next moment Judith had turned her head, and exclaimed: "Althea! oh, Althea!"

The sight of me opened again the floodgate of her grief, and she began to sob piteously.

"No one cares but *me*," she said; "no one remembers him but *me*. Agnes fancies she cared for him, but she can laugh and talk of other things; while I—I can only wonder why God is cruel to leave me, when He has taken the light of my eyes from me; for it is cruel."

Undisciplined, unsanctified grief, how terrible it is!

"She will be better soon," Agnes said, bending over Judith, and wiping her tears away. "It is the first sight of you which tries her. We will leave her a little while with Bean's niece, who is now with her, and come back again." I put my hand within Agnes's arm, and we went slowly to the house. "She is very feeble in mind and body," Agnes said; "but you have seen her at her worst. She will be brighter presently."

"And poor George! how does he bear up?"

"Bravely!" Agnes said warmly. "He is so patient and kind."

I felt like one in a dream walking amidst shadows, and wondering what was real and what was a vision; and when my brother-in-law came towards me with outstretched hand, my firmness began to give way. And yet what was *my* sorrow to that of the parents of poor Primrose?

"I am glad to see you, my dear," George said; "very glad. I wish you had made this your headquarters. But you are coming back to the Croft, and that is a good move." Thus he talked on till we reached the old sitting-room—so full of memories. For a moment I hesitated, and said, "Not here!" and then I repented. Why *not* there?—a sacred place, and hallowed to me henceforth.

"Dear, dear, I forgot," George said; "but sit down, and, Agnes, fetch some wine—she looks faint."

But I soon recovered, and, putting my hand in George's, I said:

"You, too, have suffered deeply."

"Yes," he said. "I go down to the grave a childless man. Your boy will follow me here, and with a mother like you he is sure to be of the right sort. I need not say to you, Althea, look well after him while he is a youngster, and don't give him too much head. Keep the reins well in hand."

"I will try to do so," I said; "but it is a sad fate for my boy to be without a father at an age when he wants him most."

"Yes, yes; but then what a mother he has in you. Well, you find your poor sister a wreck—looks quite the old woman; and somehow, Althea, you don't look

old, in spite of your weeds. How are the girls, eh?—the 'Star' and the 'Welcome,' as we used to call them." Poor George talked thus to hide deeper feelings, and then he said: "You would like to go to the church. Shall I take you there?"

"I would rather go alone presently, please."

"Very well. Agnes will bring you something, I hope, before long. She is like a real daughter to us. And the poor boy when he was dying bid me always take care of her for his sake. And so I will; only it's the other way, for it's she who takes care of us; she is so patient and forbearing, and a good companion in every way. I only hope Primrose Castle-Beamish will not repeat her visit. She came a few months ago with an imperial on the carriage piled up with luggage; and my lady gave herself airs, and never did more than bow coldly to our dear Agnes, and called her 'Miss Willoughby.' I have no patience with such conduct; and she set poor Judith off into hysterics, and did nothing but talk of her sons and daughters, and their brilliant marriages. I tell you what, Althea, it is shocking bad taste for prosperous folk to come and talk about their prosperity to their relations who are down in the world. And, after all, there never was a bigger scamp than old Castle-Beamish and his precious sons—a lot of regular *roués*, as all the world knows. And then for her to talk severely of our poor boy!"

"I am sorry Primrose should seem unfeeling," I said; "but I think those who live selfish lives do really forget that anything which does not affect them personally is of much importance. But, dear George,

do not let us talk of these things now, and," I added, "*here.*"

Agnes returned presently with some refreshment for me; then George, at a look from her, kindly and considerately left me alone to hold communion with God and my beloved ones whom He had called to His presence.

Alone, too, I went to the little church just at the borders of the Park. One of the servants brought me a key, and I crossed the well-known path to the river-side, and rehearsed again the far, far past. All things were full of life and beauty, in the first glory of the summer's pride.

My memories were of days of autumn, falling leaves, and winter near at hand. Then the spring was in my heart as it sang for joy; now the autumn sadness was *there*, and the summer beauty was outside me. But a sadness not, thank God, untouched with *hope*. I was not one of those most sorrowful of all sorrowful ones, who see no bow in the cloud, through whose tears there is no rainbow shining. My anchor was within the veil, and though I was tossed on a stormy sea, I was not suffered to drift away from my moorings.

The little church was very plain, and far from attractive in its exterior or interior arrangements in those days. There has been a change since then, in the feelings of most people, that the house of God should be fair and chaste in its appearance, and that it should not be left in careless disregard of what is appropriate and convenient.

When I opened the door the whole church was flooded with sunshine, and in the side-chapel, where

the monuments to the memory of Allinghams of many generations were collected, the sun's rays slanted in from a small window above, and made one of those pathways of light in which innumerable particles dance and play, and which, when I was a child, I always called Jacob's ladder.

The association was a happy one to me then. I knelt on the stone which closed the entrance to the vault, and looked up at the plain marble tablet which told that the mortal part of "Colonel the Honourable Oliffe Allingham, second son of Henry, sixth Baron Allingham, and Letitia his wife," lay beneath. "'He endured hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.' This tablet is placed here in loving memory by his wife, Althea Allingham. He entered into rest on the 10th day of November, 1820. The eldest son of Oliffe and Althea Allingham, St. John Primrose Allingham, followed his father to the kingdom of God's dear Son two years later, November 11th, 1822. 'Not lost, but gone before.' 'So He giveth his beloved sleep.'"

I rose from my knees at last, with the words of the patriarch on my lips: "Surely this is none other than the house of God—this is the gate of heaven."

My childish dream of the ladder on which the angels of God ascended and descended in a ray of light, like that which seemed as a pathway to heaven, was, as it were, realized.

I think, I humbly believe, the angels of God were present and strengthened me; and I may mark that hour passed in the church as a point from which I set forth to the duties of my common life, braced and strengthened.

From that day the waters of Marah were sweetened for me, and I blessed God and took courage.

My long absence had alarmed Agnes Willoughby, and I found her in the porch waiting for me.

"I did not like to disturb you," she said, "but I thought you were absent a long time, and I felt as if I must come and walk back to the Park with you."

I put my hand within her arm, and she, looking down into my face, said:

"I, too, come here alone sometimes. Did you see the monument to his memory?"

I was struck with my own disregard of Agnes's share in the sorrows that had fallen upon our house, and said:

"No, but do come back and show it to me."

"It is not what *I* would have chosen," Agnes said gently; "but its costliness seemed to give poor Lord and Lady Allingham comfort, and it was not for me to interfere."

We returned to the chapel, and I wondered I had missed looking at the large mural tablet surmounted by two weeping figures, and a drooping willow.

The Allingham arms were cut in relief on a shield, and poor Primrose's style and title, with his descent from old French noblesse, set forth in magniloquent language. The last words of the inscription were inexpressibly sad:

"This monument is erected by his father, and his inconsolable mother, whose anguish of soul no words inscribed here can tell."

Agnes made no comment; but after a few minutes' silence we left the church together.

"There was much comfort for *me*," she said. "He was so submissive and so gentle at last."

"Tell me about it," I said. "I have never really heard particulars."

"You know," Agnes said, "he was in a state of wild delirium at first. On the day of Colonel Allingham's funeral he sank into a stupor. The doctors thought this was a crisis, and that he might rally; but the strength of his constitution was too deeply undermined. He lay for many weeks in a condition of distressing weakness; but he never murmuréd or complained. The only thing which disturbed him was his poor mother's passionate grief and entreaties for forgiveness. She could not control herself, and at last we had to keep her away from the room. I used to read to him, and sing to him hymns—the hymns St. John liked best. He always asked for them; and I would repeat certain passages from the Bible to him again and again, of which he was never tired. And he continually mentioned you, and said how much he loved you."

"Did you ever hear much of what had happened in those years of separation?"

"Not much. I think they were reckless years, and I try not to dwell on them," she said sadly. "My only misgiving, and it haunts me at times painfully, is that I ought to have braved contempt and everything else, and consented to marry him. It *might* have been different if I had."

"We must not go back to what might have been," I said. "I think, as I thought at Sidmouth, when you first confided in me, that all secret marriages are wrong, and that you were right to refuse."

"He was so good to me," Agnes said; "and his home was so unhappy!"

"I know it," I replied. "But, my dear child, it is never safe to act against our sense of right, and trust that good may come out of evil."

"Yes," she said gently; "but there are times when, do what I will, I can't help looking back and reproaching myself. But I think," she added brightly, "I am of use here. He gave me to his father's care, and told him to treat me as a daughter; and he never fails in kindness to me."

"With my poor sister it is different," I said.

"She is scarcely responsible now. The doctors say her mind is very weak, as well as her body; and she cannot walk, as you see, without support. I shall never leave her; and be the time long or short, my place is here while I am wanted. I am so glad you have Mrs. Broughton with you, and it is delightful to think that you are all coming to the Croft! You cannot think how I longed to be with St. John, and how I have wanted to see Stephen and the girls—and *you*," she added; "you, who first took me out of the valley of humiliation, and taught me that there are some noble hearts who treat the poor and rich alike as children of the one family of God. I am always thankful that I lived in the same house with Colonel Allingham. It was like breathing a purer air to be near him. He was so bright and cheerful, and so filled with the spirit of Christ. It was a new thing to me to find that religion was not only for Sunday, or for sad days, and sickness, and death, but for *life*—this daily common life, which we have all to share,

with its little duties and little cares, and joys and troubles."

Agnes Willoughby's face grew quite beautiful as she spoke, and my heart rejoiced in this warm testimony she thus gave to the influence of my husband.

Ah! who shall tell where the influence of a man whose manhood is given to God stops. It is like the ever-spreading circles which radiate from the point in a fair lake into which a pebble is dropped, which widen out till they reach the shore, and by the gentle motion as they touch the flowers and grasses on the bank give them the renewed sense of *life*, as the little waves lave their roots and sprinkle their leaves with crystal drops of refreshment.

CHAPTER XV.

AT THE CROFT AGAIN.

I WAS left sole guardian of my children, and my return to the Croft involved me in a great deal of business which had to be transacted. I was greatly assisted by a good friend, Mr. Barrington, who was the lawyer whose advice in all legal matters Oliffe always sought.

While I was at Sidmouth, living in complete retirement, the sense of standing alone as regards worldly matters did not press upon me so heavily. But now when there was so much to decide as to the future, and to arrange for the present, I often had need of all my courage to keep, as I really desired, a cheerful heart, and to promote the welfare of my children—not as a duty only which must be performed, but as a pleasure to *myself* as well as to them. My valued friend Mr. Barrington settled the establishment for me. We had a plain but handsome carriage, and lived in a style which was considered right for the mother and sisters of the young heir of Allingham Park. My Stephen was a fine noble little fellow of thirteen when he took up his residence at Eton. I had never had a brother nor a son a schoolboy, and I felt that in my advanced years this was quite a new experience for me,

The difficulties about taking my two girls into society were very great. The miserable condition of the Court at Windsor in the year immediately succeeding our re-settlement at the Croft is too well known for me to dwell upon here.

The King's health was very uncertain—he suffered a great deal. He was very much in the hands of Mr. Knighton, his physician, and a lady upon whom large sums were lavished. I dreaded the gossip of the Court, which was too near us, and I was only anxious to keep my two girls from intimate association with people who held up—as, alas! many did—a low standard of morality.

It was a difficult position for me; my two daughters were noticed and admired, and we had many visitors and invitations. I always dread to draw hard and fast lines, to denounce certain things as wrong, and confine the dangers of “the world” to balls and routs and theatres. At the same time I could not possibly bring myself to enter into the gay society of that period, and I could not allow my girls to go into it without me. I, too, well remembered my own unprotected condition when I went with my godmother into the society of London at the close of the last century, when at all the great parties she was intent upon the loo-tables and left me to take care of myself. I recalled the scenes at Sorleigh Manor, and I could not bring myself to run any risk of my Stella and Benvenuta being exposed to any such perils. For perilous it is for the young and inexperienced to be launched upon the world without a true friend at hand to watch for the quicksands which abound, and sound a note of timely warning.

My nieces, Lady Castle-Beamish's youngest children, had married early and well in the eyes of the world. One of them, Mrs. Bosanquet, proposed a visit to us in the spring of 1829, and arrived with a maid, and one dear little girl, the child of her husband by his first marriage.

As soon as my niece arrived, I found that desire to visit us was not the only reason which brought her to Windsor.

Mr. Bosanquet had received an invitation to the dinner given in honour of the Dukes of Orleans and Chartres, and a children's ball was to follow, at which the little Princess Victoria and the Queen of Portugal were to be present.

My niece considered it a great mark of distinction that her little stepdaughter was invited, and nothing was talked about but the child's dress, while a dancing-master was in attendance daily to put her through the steps of the waltz then coming into favour.

Little Leonora Bosanquet was a sweet child, entirely submissive to her stepmother, who was proud of her beauty, and did her best to spoil her.

"Mother," Stella said to me the night after her cousin's arrival, "shall we never go to balls? I *do* wish we could sometimes. It does seem hard that we should *never* go."

Cecilia Bosanquet heard this remark, and stopping in the arranging of some strings of pearls on a head-dress, said:

"You *don't* mean to say you two have been pre-

sented and yet never been to a ball? Aunt Althea, it *is* too bad. Stella would be sure to make a sensation. I declare I will, by hook or by crook, get them an invitation for the ball! You surely will let the girls go under my chaperonage if I succeed?"

Stella's eyes brightened; and even Benvenuta said with a great sigh of longing:

"*I should* like to see the grand people just for once!"

Stephen, who was at home for a Sunday from Eton, here exclaimed:

"Of course you ought to go. One of the fellows' sisters in my house is going in a dress of frosted silver, with a veil at her back. He is vastly conceited and stuck up about her getting an invitation; and now I'll be quits, and tell him my sisters and cousin will be there, and his sister won't beat *mine*."

"Wait till the invitation is certain for us, Stephen, before you boast about it," said Benvenuta.

"Well," my niece said, "I am one of those people who always push for what I want till I get it, and you'll see I'll manage it."

She did manage it; and the next thing was that my sister, Lady Castle-Beamish, announced her intention of coming to Windsor, as she had also received a command to attend the ball.

Mary Broughton looked gravely at all the preparations, and when my two children stood ready dressed in their ball costume, she turned away with a sigh. Was I right to give my consent? Life grew at this time so terribly perplexing; and I missed—ah! *how I*

missed the word from Oliffe, which would have decided one way or other!

Mr. Barrington was of opinion that under the care of their aunt, and with their cousin, my daughters ought to present themselves at the ball; and almost everyone but Mary Broughton was on my side.

Dear Mary, in the singleness of her heart, with her life of self-sacrifice behind her, and its memory present with her—the life which was so simple and so patriarchal in its character—could not understand my difficulties. I think we often notice that those who have no children cannot enter into the multitude of claims which children bring, nor fully weigh in the balance the “fors” and “againsts” in a decision like that I was called on to make.

I had to consider so many things which Mary set aside; and amongst them was the age of my two girls. They were no longer children, being now at this time twenty-three years old. My May-blossoms had passed the early spring, and were not like me when at sixteen I was committed to my godmother’s care, ignorant of everything beyond Abbotsholme, and a mere child in mind as in years. Stella and Benvenuta were of an age to judge for themselves; and I trusted to the firm basis of Christian principle in which their father and I had striven to build up their characters in early youth, to stand them in good stead now. Nor was I disappointed.

They were dressed in white with great simplicity. Their own taste and mine forbade any extravagant ornament; and their abundant hair was gathered up

at the top of their heads, and then allowed to fall in natural waves and curls. Natural flowers, then seldom used in full dress, were fastened on the front of the pure white satin of their gowns and in their hair.

Cecilia Bosanquet looked at her cousins with evident admiration, and said:

"After all, there is nothing like white for the young."

Then the door opened, and in came her mother, my sister Primrose, in full Court costume, but looking, by the help of rouge and powder, wonderfully young.

She was a year my senior, and who could have believed it to be possible? Her figure was still slim, and even youthful. The marks time had left on her brow and cheeks were carefully effaced, and her graceful head, so well set on her shoulders, was carried with ease and dignity.

"Don't touch me, child," she said, as Stella went forward to kiss her aunt. "Never touch anyone who is dressed; remember that. We are made to be looked at then. Well, I have two white swans to take under my wing," she continued. "Have they no pearl ornaments, Althea? They are hardly dressed enough, I fancy."

"They look perfect, mother," Cecilia Bosanquet said; "and so does my little fairy, who hopes to dance in the same set with the little Queen of Portugal. And what do you say to *me*, mother?"

"Oh, you will pass," Primrose said, tapping Cecilia's

cheek with her fan. "That silk is very pretty shot with blue. And what diamonds, child! You have outshone me."

"I thought you knew I married to get the diamonds," Cecilia said quickly; and then, as little Leonora looked up at her stepmother with a surprised glance, she hastened to say: "But *this* child is better than a thousand diamonds. I am only in fun, little Leonora."

In a few minutes they were all gone, and Mary Broughton and I were left to spend the evening by ourselves.

There was an incessant roll of carriages till the morning dawned, and as I sat by my window, which commanded a view of the Castle, I saw the morning light strengthen on the Round Tower; and the whole majestic pile soon stood out against the sky, where a beautiful sunrise was suffusing the eastern heavens with glory. The birds were singing in the trees, and the loveliness of all nature seemed but little in harmony with the tired and weary dancers who returned about three o'clock.

My two girls came up to my room, and I helped them to undress, as I never allowed my servants, who had to be at work all day in my service, to be kept up at night.

Benvenuta and Stella slept in a room which opened from mine. Benvenuta was too utterly worn out to talk; but Stella was full of this her first real introduction into the gay world.

"It was all most beautiful, mother. And the King

went about talking to everyone. He said he remembered aunt Primrose, and that she looked as young as ever. Then we were presented by cousin Cecilia, and also made our curtseys to the Duke of Orleans and the Duke of Chartres. But oh, mother," Stella continued, "I did wish you could have seen our own Princess Victoria and the little Queen of Portugal! The Queen of Portugal was very grandly dressed, and had a heavy crimson velvet gown with pearls, and a riband and order over her shoulder. She sat by the King, and everyone knelt and kissed her little hand when presented. But it was our own Princess I loved to watch. She was with her mother, the Duchess of Kent, and continually by the side of the Duchess of Clarence, who seemed very fond of her. The Princess was simply dressed in pure white, just as a child ought to be; and she did look so sweet and clever, just as if she were watching everyone. While the little Queen of Portugal was dancing the waltz she tripped and fell on her face, and seemed very much frightened, and as if she were going to cry. You would have been pleased, mother, to see the Princess Victoria looking so anxiously into her face afterwards, and evidently distressed at the accident."

This interesting anecdote of the Princess seemed to be Stella's chief pleasure, and I was surprised that she had said so little about herself. It was from my sister and niece the next day that I heard how my children were admired; how Stella was sought for as a partner by the Earl of Chesterfield, who, my sister assured me, was considered one of the most brilliant young men of the time, with an enormous fortune.

"He seemed quite *épris*," Cecilia said; "and just think what it would be for Stella to capture him!"

I disliked this style of talking, but Benvenuta told me that all her aunt and cousin said was true, and that Stella had been particularly admired, but that she did not seem to know it. Certainly my child bore about with her the shield of simplicity, and freedom from self-consciousness. Her only remark about Lord Chesterfield was:

"I was very glad when the dance was over. He talked such nonsense, I did not listen to half he said. All about wings, and where I had left them when I came into the ballroom, for he was sure I had come down from another planet, all in white! I could not endure him, and his hair was so curled and smelt so strong of pomatum. Oh, I hope I shall never dance with him again!"

After all, the delights of the world were not overpowering; Stella and her sister were quite satisfied to return to our quiet life after the unwonted gaieties of the ball, and the review of the troops in the Park, where my girls had good places under their aunt's care.

During the spring of the following year, 1830, I was more frequently at Allingham Park, for my sister became more and more restless, and Agnes Willoughby was tired and worn by the constant attendance on her.

One day, late in May, just before the great Eton

Montem, my brother-in-law turned suddenly to me as I was walking up and down the terrace with him, and said:

"Althea, don't keep your boy too short of money."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "I don't understand you."

"I mean that Stephen often comes to me for a little cash, and though I am ready enough to give him a hundred pounds if he wants it, still you ought to know it."

A cold thrill of fear shot through me. Stephen—a boy of fourteen—professing to confide in me, and all the time deceiving me! The shock was so great that I caught George's arm for support.

"Now, now; don't look that, my dear," George said. "The boy has done no harm, but they are an extravagant lot at Eton; and he is pretty well fleeced, I take it. You had better get Barrington to speak to the house-master. A great deal goes on that is taken little heed of. It won't do for *me* to speak, as I made such a poor hand with my own son."

"I shall speak to Stephen myself," I said, "before I speak to anyone else. Oh, George, is the old story to be told over again?"

"Not a bit of it; he has got *you* for a mother, and he won't go far wrong."

Only fourteen! and to be spending money beyond his allowance, and, what hurt me far more, keeping his difficulty from me! I had, as I have said, no former experience to guide me. In many families a girl has brothers, whose school-life has its ups and downs, and

she hears them discussed by her parents. But I had never had brothers. My dear St. John had been singularly free from the faults and the temptations of boyhood. Safe under the care of his father and me, he had never been exposed to anything like temptation. But Stephen was indeed of a different type. He had all the spirit of his father in his early days, and, looking back on them, I remembered how love availed when coercion failed; and therefore I determined to lose no time in seeing Stephen. Neither Mr. Barrington nor anyone else should see his master; I would see him myself.

The régime of public schools has materially altered in the last few years, and will alter still more. But Eton, that school which has sent forth so many great men to do good service in the battle of life, had its peculiar temptations for those who were susceptible of flattery, and who were supposed to have unlimited money at their disposal. The allowances made by some parents to their sons were extravagant, and only engendered a love of luxury and self-indulgence, which was most prejudicial. At this time also there was no good influence in high places. How different from the present, when, as I write, we have set before us the finest and most noble example of young manhood in the Consort of our Queen! Mothers may well point to him and urge their sons to follow in his steps.

I drove at once to Eton, and had an interview with my boy's master. He was suave and courteous, allowed that Stephen had not got into a very good set, and that he had thought of writing to me; but he

was a fine little fellow, and he felt sure he would do better now that two boys, who had worked some mischief in that part of the school, had been requested to leave it.

"I should like to see Stephen," I said.

But he was on the river, as it was a half-holiday; he could have leave of absence the next Sunday, if I pleased, the master told me. "The great day will be over then, and he will have quieted down," he added.

It was strange and new to me to dread the sound of my boy's footsteps on the stairs; and he looked so handsome as he bounded into the room and gave me one of his rough embraces!

My heart almost failed me, but I did not delay; and saying I wanted to say something to him in my sitting-room, I led the way there.

"What is it, mother?"

"Surely you know?" I said. "Dear Stephen, have you concealed nothing from me?"

"Uncle George has been——" he began in an angry voice.

"Yes, your uncle has told me you continually go to him for money. Why did you not come to me? It is this deception that grieves me so deeply, Stephen."

"I am not deceitful," he said. "I am uncle George's heir; and I shall be Lord Allingham. Surely I ought to have as good an allowance as the son of a rich ironmaster or cotton-spinner? It is quite ridiculous, mother, to think——"

"Stephen," I said, "remember your father and your brother; try to be worthy of them."

"You can't expect me to be like poor St. John," he said; "he was never able to do things like other boys, and my father knew it. I don't think you know much about boys, mother; you should just see what other fellows do; I know you would be surprised. It's all right, I assure you."

"No, it is all wrong, Stephen. I had trusted you so entirely; and though lately I have seen a cloud sometimes on your face, I could not understand, I thought it might be that your work was too hard, and that you found you could not keep pace with your form. Stephen, remember you are the *only* son of your mother, and she is a widow. It will be a bitter disappointment to me if you grow up a self-pleasing, self-indulgent man. Make a brave stand *now*; it will be easier than it will be a few years hence. You know how dearly I love you, and how I long to see you worthy to follow your father's steps—your noble father, who in his youth turned his face resolutely towards *good*, and forsook the evil, to which he was sorely tempted. Oh, Stephen! try to be what your father would have wished you to be."

My tears could no longer be restrained; perhaps they pleaded for me more than my words could do.

My boy flung himself on his knees by my chair, and hid his face on my shoulder.

"Sweet mother!" he whispered, "I *will* try; but you don't know—oh, you don't know how hard it is,

when fellows at school bother and tease and bully unless you do what they do."

It all came out then, and I felt that what Mary Broughton said was true. The public-school life is as a furnace to try the metal of which our boys are made. Let us be thankful that many come out of the crucible refined and purified; many walk through the fire unscathed. When the barrier was broken down, Stephen told me, still kneeling by my side, with his face hidden, how he had yielded to temptation, played cards, and always lost; treated others to wine, and even lent sums of money to those who were in debt.

I do not think he hid anything from me, and my experience leads me to encourage all mothers, more especially those who are left as I was, sole guardian of my boy, to use the great weapon of love in their dealings with their sons. I believe if I had told myself I did well to be angry, and had sharply scolded Stephen on this crisis of his young life, I should have always repented it. But at the same time I strove not to let my love be a weak love. We talked over the money he had received from his uncle, and then he gave me a list of some small debts at school, and we agreed that his allowance should be curtailed, until the sum I advanced him to pay them was repaid to me, and he promised to go as soon as possible to Allington Park, and tell his uncle all that had passed, and his earnest desire to amend.

Not all at once did the change come; there were failures and disappointments. But from that moment I never lost the entire confidence of my

Stephen; and he became the staff and support of my old age.

This month of June, 1830, was marked by the death of George IV. The girls came into my room early in the morning of the 26th to say that the King died at a quarter after three o'clock, and that messengers had been sent to Bushey, to communicate the news to the Duke of Clarence—now King William IV. No one was surprised at the news; we all knew that the King had been sick unto death for some time. And sad indeed it was to think of the life thus ended, wrecked as it had been by want of self-discipline and the absence of the true secret of strength for king and peasant alike.

We were, as I have said, brought very near royalty by our residence at Windsor, and the events which took place there became much more real to us than to those who lived in distant parts of the kingdom.

Between the day of the King's death on June 26 to July 15, we had continually before us the rejoicings on one side for the new King, and preparations for the funeral of the old one on the other—so strangely was the solemnity of death mingled with the stir and bustle of life. The town was filled all day with people making a holiday of the occasion, and a great deal of unseemly confusion reigned in consequence.

Carriages and hackney-coaches were passing and repassing to and from Richmond all the morning, and my brother-in-law arrived about noon to take Stella and Benvenuta under his charge. They had tickets

for places on a platform near the right of the inner court; and, while the procession was passing, the dense mass of people outside, and on the roofs of houses kept profound silence. As the procession reached the Round Tower, the clock struck nine; and the firing of the rocket, followed by the solemn sound of the minute-guns, told me, as I sat quietly in my own room, that the mortal part of George IV. was on its way to its last resting-place.

The evening was warm, though a fresh breeze was stirring, and the lighted flambeaux of the Foot Guards flickered and cast a weird light around. I could see the flickering light from my window, and the solemn tones of the "Dead March" fell on my ear, as regiment after regiment took up the mournful strain. The procession entered at the great door of the Chapel, and the Eton boys, my Stephen amongst them, were drawn up there. George brought the girls home as soon as the procession had returned to the Castle, and they were weary and excited.

"Poor things!" George said. "It was almost too much for their tender hearts; but you and I, Althea, have seen bitterer sorrow."

"Oh, mother!" Stella exclaimed; "I could not help thinking there was no one to be very sorry for the poor King—no one who would be really broken-hearted. I think it was this thought made me cry. The new King looked grave, not sad, and all the time he must have felt that a great change had come to him."

"Did you see Stephen?"

"Yes, mother; he was close to us twice. He looked very grave, and, instead of whispering and talking as some of the boys did while they were waiting, he stood quite still, and only looked up once at us and smiled. Stephen has been very different of late."

George looked at me, and we understood each other. I had not told my boy's sisters about the late trouble, for I hold it is always better to speak as little as possible of the faults of one child to the others, unless some good is likely to result from it.

The day had dawned before the town quieted down, and George and I sat up talking of many things, past and present, till it was broad daylight. He told me he thought Judith was getting much weaker, and begged me to come to Allingham Park as frequently as I could.

"And I do not think," he added, "that I shall be long after her, poor thing! I wish I were a comfort to her. I have done my best; but, somehow or other, she always speaks as if our poor boy's sad life and death were my fault more than anybody's."

"That is neither kind nor right," I said. "You have been good, and forbearing beyond all precedent."

"Ah, ah! so you say, my dear," George went on; "you always did look on the best side of everybody. My poor boy used to say you put on spectacles to look for people's good qualities, and took them off again when their bad ones were mentioned. That boy of yours came to me the other day, and there never was a finer fellow. He made no excuses for himself, though it is pretty plain those big fellows, of whom

his house is now happily quit, were to blame for everything. He looked uncommonly like his father, just as he looked when he came into the old house at Abbotsholme, and found me there and poor old uncle Baldwin, and knew that I had pushed him out of his place. Sometimes I wish, Althea, that those papers proving my birthright had been at the bottom of the sea with the servant who took charge of them. Well, well—his boy is my heir, so it has come round all right; and there is no one to push him out, that's very certain. I am doing my best to keep all things straight, and when the boy comes into Allingham Park, he will find no burdens; I have paid off the mortgages, and the home farm is thriving under my steward's good management. I am always expecting, Althea, to hear some one is wanting to carry off one of your girls. You must let them go out more now. The Queen, they say, is a right good woman, and she will do her best to make the Court a safer place for the young than it has been for many a long year. Better times are coming, though we shall not live to see them; for they say the Duchess of Kent is bringing up the little Princess in the wisest and most sensible way. Depend upon it, if she is ever Queen of England it will be a blessed day for the nation."

George's prophecy was fulfilled, and I may thank God I have lived to see it!

We talked together for a long time, and then retired to seek the refreshment of sleep which we so greatly needed after the excitement of the day.

On my way to my own room I looked in upon my children. Stella was asleep, but Benvenuta was awake.

"Oh, you dear mother," she said, "I am so glad you are come! I can't shut my eyes, and yet I am so tired. Come close to me."

I went, and she threw her arms round my neck, and I saw something was upon her mind.

"You know Cecil Barrington, mother?"

"Yes," I said, "of course I know him." He was the son of our good friend Mr. Barrington, on whose judgment on all matters of business I relied.

"He came to us on the platform," Benvenuta continued, "and was so kind in helping us through the crowd; and—he was so kind to *me*. He told me he was coming to see you to-morrow—I mean to-day—and he is going to ask you a question."

The truth then flashed upon me, and with a thrill of surprise. It is true Cecil Barrington had been with us at Brighton during the previous autumn a good deal, when he was curate at one of the churches there. But although I had been on my guard about the attentions of several people which were directed to Stella, and had even refused for her several offers of marriage, I had not thought of Benvenuta. I had an idea that Stella would marry, and her sister remain with me and be the comfort of my declining years.

Like many another mother, I was entirely mistaken. The castles in the air which we are all prone to build about our children are seldom realized.

Instantly my thoughts went to my child's father, and as I remembered how highly he valued Cecil Barrington's father I took courage.

"Dear mother, he is very good; and he is hoping

to get a living soon," Benvenuta said; "and I shall so dearly like to be a clergyman's wife. I am not like Stella, fit for society. I am never so happy as when I am with you, and——"

"Yet you want to leave me," I said playfully.
"That is bad reasoning!"

"You know all about it, mother; and I am certain you will be kind to—to—Cecil. He is rather afraid of you, and expects to hear what such people as Cecilia Bosanquet and aunt Primrose will say."

"We will not trouble ourselves as to what others say, dear child," I replied; "we will think of what is for your happiness, and of what your dear father would wish."

"I like to hear you call us children, mother; but you forget how time passes, and that we two are long past children."

Yes, it was quite true—time had lost its full significance for me; and now that I was brought face to face with the first real love-story in which one of my children was concerned, I seemed to realize, more than I had ever done, that the sun of my own life was setting.

And yet I was glad at heart that Benvenuta's gentle serene nature should be quickened into active service by that great magician, Love. With Stella, always brilliant, and attracting admiration on all sides, her sister had naturally been more thrown into the shade, and became perhaps too quiet and reserved; and as I received her fervent embrace, and heard her whisper, "I knew you would be kind about it, mother, and I *do* love him very much," I felt that my child's

future was, as far as she was concerned, decided; and I went to my room to pour out my spirit in earnest entreaty that Benvenuta's future might be as blessed as my past had been.

Happy, oh! thrice happy, is the wife and mother who can desire for her daughters no nobler or more tender husband than their father has been to her!

CHAPTER XV.

TWO LOVE-STORIES.

My dear child Benvenuta's love-story ran smoothly, for all who came in contact with Cecil Barrington felt that he was no ordinary man. His father had been the trusted friend as well as legal adviser of my husband, and thus we were not forming an alliance with strangers.

Mr. Barrington was very helpful in all necessary arrangements, and he could with truth say that his son was worthy of my daughter—except, as he added modestly, for the accident of birth.

This was not forgotten by my relations, and Cecilia Bosanquet lamented over the prospect which Benvenuta had of spending her life in a country parsonage, just as everything was going well in London, and good Queen Adelaide was ruling the manners of the Court, so that there could no longer be any question about the most fastidious attending any festivities or ceremonies to which they were so fortunate as to be invited.

It was curious to notice how the old traditions clung to my sisters. The one in a state of semi-unconsciousness could yet rouse herself to say: "Benvenuta ought to have done better than marry the son of a solicitor;" while my sister Primrose only smiled from

her vantage ground, as she smiled on everything, sad or gay, and hinted that at five-and-twenty neither I nor Benvenuta could afford to be too particular.

But Primrose did my future son-in-law good service, and certainly deserved our gratitude. For through her influence Cecil Barrington was presented in the course of the next year to the living of Abbotsholme; and as the young Lord Castle-Beamish disliked country-town life, and never frequented our old home, it was agreed that Benvenuta and her husband should take up their abode there, and leave the curate, who was a man of slender means, in the Priory.

Thus the old house, so full of associations, was to be the early married home of my daughter; and full of brightness and happiness, I have lived to hear it echo with that sweetest of all music, the music of children's voices.

I looked forward rather anxiously to Stella's life when separated from her sister; and as there are jarring strings in many an instrument of music, so in our little household the element of discord was not wanting.

Mary Broughton, filled with earnestness and zeal, was not perhaps judicious; indeed, I could sympathize with Stella when she said:

"Mother, she rubs me the wrong way. I hate to hear her denounce the world and worldly people with bitterness, and believe *she* is altogether perfect."

This was said when our preparations were being made for Benvenuta's wedding, which Mary looked upon as sinful for the bride of a clergyman.

I granted that all our relations, who were of ne-

cessity bidden as guests, were very gay and fashionable, and that they mixed in society which I neither thought attractive nor beneficial; but I could not set myself in open opposition to them by withholding invitations to the first marriage in my family. I think there may be many, who, like Mary Broughton, consider me time-serving, and that I ran a risk of compromising my principles.

But I can never regret too much charity in my dealings with, or my judgments of others, while I do often bitterly regret harshness and exclusiveness, which are so contrary to the teaching and practice of our dear Lord and Master.

Benvenuta was married in September, 1831, and my sister Primrose and her married daughters took a house in town for the approaching Coronation. Primrose had a seat amongst the peeresses for the ceremony, and Stella was with her cousins in a very good place, while Stephen was with his uncle.

I was glad that Stella should have this diversion of thought after the parting from her sister. They had never been separated before, and although their characters were so widely different, they had been much united. Benvenuta had always admired Stella without a particle of jealousy mingling with her admiration; and it had become so natural to her to give Stella the first place, and to put herself in the shade, that it was natural that Stella should accept the first place!

Now, when Benvenuta was really the object of the tenderest devotion from a good and true-hearted man, her sister felt that sense of loss and desolation which sisters so circumstanced can well understand. The

married daughter remains to her mother what she has ever been; but the sister, who has shared thoughts and feelings from her nursery days to womanhood, feels that the *third* person, who has come between her and her sister, however good and true and kindly he may be, makes a gulf of separation which cannot be bridged over. Stella looked beautiful and sad on the day of the wedding, and attracted almost more attention than the bride.

They were dressed alike, except that a large veil, which had belonged to the first Lady Allingham, was thrown over Benvenuta's small white chip bonnet. This veil was an heirloom, and of costly lace; but the yellow hue rather spoiled the effect of the pure white of the bride's dress.

Stella's visit to her aunt in London extended over some weeks, and I went to Allingham Park and shared the nursing with Agnes Willoughby, who was now entirely tied to my poor sister's bedside, for she rarely left her room now.

It is extraordinary how the interests which immediately concern us seem to drive out the mention of public events, and yet at this time these were of a momentous character.

The country was divided against itself, as the first Reform Bill—now simmering in the minds of thousands—came under consideration. Then there was the cloud, as yet on the distant horizon, of the probable approach of the dreaded scourge of cholera. It came upon us in the same year as the great battle for Reform, and we were unprepared for it. It carried off hundreds of victims amongst high and low, and the

alarm it occasioned amounted to a panic of fear, which increased the danger and the severity of the disease in many cases.

I settled at the Croft, and welcomed my Stella home in November. She had many stories to tell of all she had seen; but she was very silent and reserved about herself. She had been at Queen Adelaide's Drawing-room, and had told me how quiet and gentle she seemed.

One very characteristic anecdote she heard of Queen Adelaide is worth recording. When she was asked to decide as to what crown she would wear at the coronation, she said she did not wish to wear a hired crown, as she did not think it appropriate.

When told that his late Majesty, George IV., had worn one at his gorgeous coronation, she said simply:

"I do not like it. I have jewels enough, and I will have them made up myself."

The King agreed, and gave orders that the setting should be undertaken and paid for, when the Queen replied:

"*No*; I shall pay for the setting of my own jewels myself."

"There was something very honest in this," Stella remarked; "and that is exactly what I believe the Queen to be."

The King's speeches, and what he says and does, Stella told me, were the common topics of conversation. He is certainly very eccentric, but kindly and good-natured; and does not spare himself in giving due attention to all that devolves on him.

It has been found necessary to pass a Regency Bill, as the King and Queen have no children, and

this has made much dissension. The Duke of Wellington has had, of course, the chief management of this affair, and a most difficult part he has had to play. I often think how far easier he must have found it to lead on his well-disciplined army to hard-fought victories, than guide the helm of the State at this time.

Stella saw the Princess Victoria in Kensington Gardens several times. The Duchess of Kent often breakfasted there in the open air in fine weather; and those who pass to their daily occupation, clubs, and those engaged in business, look upon the picture of the simplicity of royal life with that touch of feeling which makes the whole world kin.

"Our little Princess," Stella said, "wore in Kensington Gardens a straw hat lined with pale blue, and a white dress, which set off her beautiful complexion, and made her look what her father loved to call her, his May-blossom."

"As your dear father called you," I said.

"Yes," Stella said, somewhat sadly. "And now one May-blossom is gone from us for ever."

"Nay, my child, do not speak so mournfully. Think of the happy home to which your sister is gone; in the old house where I spent my childhood, which has now, in God's providence, fallen to my daughter as an inheritance!"

"I don't think Mrs. Broughton does think it is in God's providence," Stella said. "I heard her lamenting that the living had been given to Cecil Barrington, as such an unworthy successor of her father-in-law. Just because Cecil cannot talk precisely as Mrs. Broughton

talks, and can be merry and bright, she does not think he is religious. Mother, when I hear her speaking like that, it makes me feel as if I could rush into the world and never have a serious thought again!"

"You must be patient with your mother's early friend, Stella; and remember that if she had not a home with me, she would be homeless and very desolate."

"Well, I know how kind you are," Stella said; "but I do hope Mrs. Broughton won't do Stephen harm by looking so solemn when he is here on Sundays, as if even to smile were a sin."

When Stella talked in this strain I always felt anxious about her; and I felt sure there was some secret root of bitterness which, springing up, troubled her. As far as I knew—and we mothers must always guard what we say of our children by some cautious reservation—as far as I knew, Stella's heart had been untouched hitherto by love. She had received several proposals of marriage, but she would tell me, with a smile, that she had never thought twice of the gentlemen who had done her the honour.

"I shall never marry, mother," she used to say. "I shall stay with you."

But at this time my fears were taking shape about Stella.

Stephen, when he came home for Sunday in the early part of March, asked me what was the matter with Stella. "She is changed; everyone must see that."

It was like the first note of warning about my boy St. John's state, which, with a sudden thrill of sur-

prise, opened my eyes to his condition—a condition which, going on day after day, and week after week, I had not recognised.

"How is she changed, Stephen?" I asked.

"She looks miserable, mother, that is plain enough. There must be some thing wrong. Have you asked her?"

No, I had not asked the direct question, always dreading to force a confidence that was not voluntary. I had my own anxieties, but they had been vague and shadowy, and now they assumed a more tangible shape.

Stephen saw I looked distressed, and said:

"I dare say nothing is wrong after all, only I can't help seeing that she is often nearly crying, especially when that old Mrs. Broughton begins to preach."

"Do not speak of my friend in that way, Stephen; it hurts me."

"Very well then, I will call her *young* if you like it," Stephen said, laughing; "but I *am* sorry for Stella, the star of beauty, as some of our fellows call her."

I was interrupted here by a messenger from Allingham, who brought the news that my poor sister Judith's long illness had ended very suddenly, and that she had died early that morning in her sleep.

I went at once in the carriage to the Park, and did my best to help and comfort Agnes Willoughby and poor George.

"There was light at eventide," Agnes said, "for all yesterday she was touchingly gentle and kind, and talked of you with the deepest affection. I always read the Bible to her morning and evening,

and last evening she asked me to read the portion I had chosen over again—it was the fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel—and when I had finished she asked me to pray that she might find an entrance into one of the many mansions through Christ's loving mercy."

It was all very touching and solemn; so many memories rose before me—my stately beautiful sister and our early days all came back. The sadness of the wrecked life, the loneliness of the poor heart when her boy had been taken from her, and the little effort she had made to win back the love of the poor man who was now weeping like a child for her loss.

I returned to the Croft the next day, and was met by Mary Broughton with a very serious face. I was naturally much over-wrought, and when she put into my hand a letter in Stella's handwriting, I sank down quite unable to open it.

When I had courage to do so, I found the letter was to tell me that she had gone away to her sister's at Abbotsholme, and that if anyone came to inquire for her I was to be sure to keep that person in ignorance of her destination. She said she had gone because a temptation was getting too strong for her, and that she felt when with Benvenuta she should find rest, "if ever I am to find it again." Pathetic words!

Mary Broughton stood by me as I read the letter, and then said:

"What is it, dear Althea? We have not seen Stella since last evening. Oh, I fear, I greatly fear I was right, and the poor moth has singed her wings in the cruel flames of this sinful world, which you

allowed her—nay, encouraged her—to frequent! There have been inquiries for her, and a gentleman has left his card, and will return presently. Oh, my poor Althea! this is a greater trial than any you have yet known! This is so terrible!"

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed, starting up. "What is there sinful in Stella going to her sister's? The most natural thing^s possible. She wants change, and—and—" I broke down now, not into a flood of tears, for age seldom knows that blessed relief, but I was agitated and angry with Mary.

Every true mother knows that she is the last person in the world to think the worst of her child, or rather to give the thought words; and how bitterly she resents the condemnation from another which she dare not express herself.

"You really know nothing about Stella, Mary," I said; "and at any rate you have done nothing to make home life attractive to her!"

I spoke harshly, and very soon repented of my words, for poor Mary turned away, and quietly left the room. She had scarcely done so, when Jenkyns, my servant, brought up a card, and said:

"This gentleman has called twice before to-day."

I read the name on the card: "Sir Percival Pierpoint."

A tall and strikingly handsome man now came into the room, and speaking in a low well-modulated voice, said:

"Mrs. Allingham, I think."

I bowed. Then he took a chair by me, and in a calm and apparently unimpassioned manner, told me that he had for some time been deeply attached to

my daughter; that they had met at Lady Castle-Beamish's; that he had had the honour of attending Miss Allingham at the coronation festivities; and that she had at first favoured his suit, but that now she had drawn back and forbid him to approach me on the subject. "But I hope," he added, with a smile, "that you will allow me to press my own suit, and bring my fair star to shine on me once more. May I see her?"

"That, sir," I said, "is impossible; my daughter has left home."

"Indeed! Then I must follow her, if you will countenance my doing so."

"I can do nothing of the sort," I replied; "nor do I think it is—pardon me—the part of a true gentleman to desire to follow a lady who has refused his proposals."

"But she accepted them once; and am I to take patiently her change of mood? She said she loved me, and"—and now his voice showed real emotion—"I believe she loves me still."

"There must be some reason for the change," I said. "Stella is the last person to be fickle and inconstant; there must be a *good* reason."

The handsome face I was looking at grew dark.

"Some nonsense about religion and morals," he said. "A kind friend was so obliging as to tell Stella that I had been about the late King, and that I was not more scrupulous than my neighbours. But that is all over and done with. I am ready to do anything your daughter wishes. I have a fine place

in Durham. I can bestow everything on her. She is my guiding star—my good angel. I am still young—scarcely thirty. Surely, madam, I am not to be thrust aside for the little escapades of youth! It is not fair—it is not generous. I appeal to you to say if it can be fair or generous?"

"I do not think I can say more now, sir; I must, of course, hear my daughter's account of this unhappy business."

"And you knew nothing of this?" he asked.

"Nothing," I replied; "except that I have seen my daughter was greatly troubled, and that there was a change in her since her return home."

"It seems impossible," Sir Percival said, "that for a mere chimera your daughter should refuse to listen to me. I have a position to offer her which many, pardon me, would envy, and I am sincerely devoted to her."

This, and much more, Sir Percival repeated, and I remained firm. I would give him no encouragement, and make no promises. But the interview tried me greatly. I seemed to live again in my far past, and recalled how I had refused to promise myself definitely to my dear Oliffe, against the commands of his uncle. Then the separation which followed, and the years of waiting—and then the perfect union.

Before I retired to rest that night I wrote to my dear Stella, and begged her to be open with me, and pleaded that I deserved more confidence than she had placed in me.

I was occupied for the remainder of that sad week with the funeral of my sister. Anything connected

with death was distasteful to my sister Primrose's family, and the only representatives of the Castle-Beamishes were Mr. Bosanquet and Mr. Thynne, my sister's sons-in-law.

My dear boy Stephen went with his uncle to the funeral, and Agnes Willoughby and I went in the church. A trying ordeal for me, for the funeral pomp thought necessary added to the weight and oppression of the occasion; and I trust no one who loves me will ever sanction such a melancholy display of plumes and mutes, and all the outward signs of woe, when I am laid by my husband's side.

Poor George was convulsed with grief. All the sorrow which his son's death had given him seemed to burst forth again; and it was touching to see Agnes Willoughby step up as he was turning from the vault, and put her hand into his arm with a tender caressing gesture.

I was scarcely able to brace myself for the interview I sought with Mr. Bosanquet; but I knew I could obtain information from him about Sir Percival Pierpoint. Mr. Bosanquet was a man of the world, and was cautious in his answers.

"It would be a fine match for Stella," he said; "and no doubt she would come round." He remembered Cecilia had expected Sir Percival would propose to Stella; and they never understood why it came suddenly to an end. But they had thought probably some other admirer had won the day, "for," added Mr. Bosanquet, "your daughter is like a magnet to most people, only, when they are drawn pretty close she is off on the rebound!"

When pressed as to Sir Percival's character, he could only stroke his chin and settle the bow of his high stiff black stock, and say:

"He is all right—no worse than his neighbours, perhaps a trifle better. He knew nothing against him; he was a remarkably handsome fellow, and as rich as Croesus; and the late King had been known to say, 'if he were asked to vote as to the respective attractions of him and Lord Chesterfield, he should give the casting vote for Sir Percival!' Stella was very lucky!"

I found all questioning was hopeless, for Mr. Bosanquet's ideas of what made a man a desirable husband were so entirely at variance with mine, so I gave up in despair.

My letter addressed to my sister Primrose, and to Cecilia Bosanquet, failed also to satisfy me.

Primrose wrote to me on letter-paper with an extremely wide black border, and after a few words about Judith's death, said that in spite of our sisterly affection, we must call it a happy release.

Then she went on to ask what decision had been arrived at about that young person Miss Willoughby, and hoped she would now try to find a suitable situation.

Quite as an after-thought Primrose replied to my question about Stella.

"She had a good many admirers during the time she passed with us in Belgrave Square. I hoped Sir Percival Pierpoint was about to propose, but I am afraid he did not do so. It would be a splendid match for Stella, and compensate you for the poor

one Benvenuta has made. However, she is settled in a *family* house, which alters the case rather, only I am afraid she is too apt to allow the towns-people to be on visiting terms with her."

I was angry and impatient as I read this letter; and yet why should I be either?

The Primrose of my childhood and youth was the Primrose of my old age, with that serenity of temper, which passed for good-nature, springing from utter indifference to the cares and joys of others. But why should I recount my sister's faults? People like Primrose sail smoothly through the troubled waters of the world, and, insensible alike to great griefs or great joys, they go on the even tenor of their way, and when they pass out of sight, few are the sadder, and none the poorer. A melancholy picture this is of the life many women lead, who are admired and even courted in their day, and are blind to the great exigencies of the world around them.

Cecilia's letter was a contrast to her mother's; she was full of warmth and kindness. She did not like to say too much about Stella, because she had not taken her into her confidence, but she honestly believed that Sir Percival did love her, and that she cared for him; and, she added, whatever he may be, *that* makes all the difference.

Poor Cecilia! she had, as she said that evening at the Croft to her mother, "married that she might have the diamonds," and they had, I know, proved but cold and hard comfort.

While I was undecided as to what should be my

next step, a letter from Benvenuta came to entreat me to lose no time in going to Abbotsholme, for Stella was very ill.

With a heavy heart I made instant preparations for departure, and Mary Broughton, always kind and helpful, took upon herself the arrangements for my journey.

She was packing my trunk for the "imperial," when she suddenly looked up, and said:

"May I come with you, Althea?"

"I think I had better go alone," I said, hesitating lest I should hurt my old friend's feelings.

"I thought I might be a comfort to you," she said gently, "that is all; and I might speak a word in season to that poor girl. Oh, Althea, do not let her die in a state of self-deception; the world has bound her fast with its chains; do speak plainly to her!"

"She is not going to die!" I said vehemently. "And I dare say—anyway, Benvenuta does not hint at danger; and there is her brother-in-law at hand."

"Far from a safe guide," Mary said. "I fear——"

I turned away impatiently, and called my maid from the next room to give her some directions.

When she had attended to them, I heard a short sob, and looking round, I saw Mary Broughton in tears, kneeling by the large armchair.

My heart smote me for unkindness, and I begged her to forgive me, and make allowance for the irritation of a very troubled spirit.

"I will stay here and pray for you, dear Althea," Mary said. "You do not know how I love you, and how grateful I am to you; but I *must* be faithful, as Geoffrey was, and never be ashamed to confess Christ."

We embraced each other almost as warmly as we had done in the tent-bed, long, long ago, at Abbots-holme, and then we parted for the night.

I left home in the early morning of a sweet April day. My maid travelled on the box, and we had a quick and easy journey along the now familiar road, the hedgerows bright with primroses, and the emerald buds appearing on the trees. The old posting-stations, where we changed horses, were the same; and I recalled at one of the Inns how amused I had been at the sign of "The Gaping Goose" on my first journey along this road, and how my godmother had told poor Tugwell that *that* was an appropriate sign for her, and she would recommend her when all trades failed to set up an inn here, and get a gaping goose painted for the sign!

Poor Tugwell had at this time been many years at rest, where the ill-timed and coarse jests of her task-mistress could reach her no more; she had died of a sudden chill during the first year of our residence at the Croft.

My mind was full of anxiety and uneasiness about Stella, and yet there was room for all sorts of trivial matters; and as the horses' feet made their monotonous sound on the hard road, the old refrain came back to me.

On—on—on to Windsor! Back—back—back—ah! to my mother, or to my husband—never—never more! The experiences of old age are almost more dream-like than those of youth. We seem to be putting our hand always on shadows—to be followed by the ghost of a dead time—to be wholly unable to believe in our own identity with the "*I*" of the past.

As the chaise rattled up the narrow street, and drew up before the familiar door, this dream-like sense of unreality was upon me.

I almost expected to see Bellamy on the top step, and Pring behind him. The escutcheon which always consoled Pring for family bereavement was over the door, and nothing seemed changed.

But where was the young girl in her green pelisse? Where was the maiden who came back to find her mother dead, and afterwards to share the home with the two beautiful sisters—one now in her grave, the other buried deep under the crust of worldly aims and desires? Where was the happy rejoicing wife and mother who once, in later times, arrived at this same house with her boy upon her knees, the proudest, happiest mother in the kingdom? Vanished—quite vanished; and in the place of these an old woman who was glad to be helped up the steps by her son-in-law, and who, overcome by a host of recollections, could only falter out the question,

“How is Stella?”

“Come in, dearest mother, and we will tell you everything.”

Then Benvenuta led me to the old library, and told me Stella had recovered a little, and that the doctors thought she would escape, what they had feared, an attack of brain-fever.

“Benvenuta has been with her sister continually,” Cecil Barrington said; and he added, “I am greatly afraid of her being over-tired, so I am very glad you have come.”

When Benvenuta and I were alone together, she told me that Stella had made her promise not to tell

me anything; she wished to tell me herself. And when I had rested I took up my position by my child's bed, and in the silent watches of that night she told me all. An old, and, I fear, not an uncommon story. Let me thank God that Stella had strength given her to break away, and refuse to link herself and all her earthly future to a man who had set the law of his God at defiance, and did not profess a high standard of either morals or religion.

The sorest and bitterest part of Stella's trial was that she had thought she had in Sir Percival a true-hearted and good man, "*like father*," she whispered. "But it was all a mistake—all a delusion. Oh, mother! *you* do not know what the depths of trouble are to the woman who sees her idol is mere clay, and that she has been deceived."

"I loved him," my poor child said. "I love him still; and I dare not see him, for when he tells me that he will repair the injury he has inflicted on the innocent for my sake, that if only I will marry him he will lead a new life, my courage fails. And yet I know there is no reality—no certainty, because he scoffs at the idea of the Spirit of Christ ruling our life, and says, 'That if *I* like to believe it, he is glad that I should do so; but he—he believes in nothing!' He pretended to marry a poor friendless girl; and it was she who wrote to me and told me that I was deceived in Sir Percival. Think, mother, how dreadful! she used to stand in the wind and the rain in the streets, and watch us going out in all our finery with him in attendance; and go back to her miserable home, and her child, broken-hearted! But oh, mother! mother! it has been a hard battle! I did so hope he could deny

this false marriage—I did so hope he could tell me it was a delusion! But he could only say, ‘What if it were true? it was common enough; and I did not know anything of the world.’ Is it really true—do I know nothing of the wickedness of the world? Is it really true that such things are considered as coming in the ordinary course of things, and that the higher the rank, the more ordinary it is for men to please themselves, and make women miserable?’

A sad and searching question which it was hard to answer. I could only fold my child in my arms and tell her that if these things were common, there were, thank God, many grand exceptions to the rule. And I told her of her father, and how pure he kept his knightly honour; and how heroic was his fight against all that was mean and ignoble, armed with the Christ-like weapons of love and truth.

“And I, his poor daughter, must try to fight the battle bravely and well, as he did,” Stella said. “Sit down by me now, dear mother; I think I shall sleep *at last*.”

My kind and good son-in-law undertook to see Sir Percival Pierpoint, and communicate to him Stella’s unalterable decision, and beg him to cease to ask her for what she would never grant; and that he left it to his sense of what was kind and honourable to avoid pressing his suit any further.

“It was a very thankless office,” Cecil said; “but I felt bound to speak plainly, and I did not shirk my duty. Sir Percival has a wonderful command over himself; and though inwardly enraged against me, he

did not break forth into any invective. He thanked me with a cool irony, and said that he never cared to listen to the ramblings of Methodists; and that if I meant well, for which he gave me credit, he was afraid, as far as he was concerned, I had failed in effecting my object."

We heard no more of Sir Percival, and by slow degrees my child recovered. She was never again the same brilliant daughter whose beauty used sometimes to fill me with motherly pride. But she became infinitely dearer to me, and to all around her.

"As many as I love I rebuke and chasten," I find I have written in my old book where this story of my Stella's trouble is recorded.

At her request I left her at Abbotsholme, where she began, under Cecil's direction, ministrations amongst the poor and the sad; and the old people who remembered Lady Allingham, my mother-in-law, said it was as if she had come back to them again.

For the next few years I divided my time between Abbotsholme and Windsor; and year by year fresh springs of joy were opened for me in Benvenuta's children. It was like going back to youth again, and my own happiness as a mother. None come nearer to the heart than the children of a daughter; and Benvenuta's were, quite apart from grandmotherly partiality, very charming. Little rosy laughing creatures, like the buds on a lily spire, coming so quickly in succession that in the year 1837 there were five, all in radiant health, and all carefully trained by the best of mothers.

United in all good works, kindly, cheerful, and

sympathetic to their neighbours high and low, Benvenuta and her husband, with their children around them, made a picture which it did my heart good to look upon; and I may say that the words of one who had seen much of the sorrows and sins of this troublesome life were verified, for "the voice of joy and health was heard in the dwelling of the righteous."

CHAPTER XVI.

LEAFY JUNE.

THE month of June has been marked by memorable events in the history of this country during the present century. The 4th of June was always celebrated as the birthday of King George III., and we who lived at Windsor were particularly reminded of the anniversary by the old custom of Eton Montem. On the 18th of June, 1815, the great battle was fought which decided the destiny of Europe. On the 26th of June, 1830, George IV. passed away; and seven years later the Sailor King, who had succeeded him, died just as the clocks had chimed midnight from the belfry tower, on the 20th of the same month. Then, under the starlit sky of the summer night, before the first streaks of dawn had brightened the eastern heavens, the Archbishop of Canterbury hastened on his way to Kensington Palace to take the news to our young Princess Victoria.

Only those who lived in that time can understand how the hearts of the people were moved as the heart of one man, when this fair young girl was called upon to fill the throne of this realm. Our young Queen, who, like all members of the Royal Family, was declared of age at eighteen, was, in God's good providence, able to take up the reins of government with-

out the necessity of a regency, which many people dreaded.

I was at Abbotsholme at the time, and the news was brought to me there by my dear son Stephen. For he, too, had on that very day succeeded to the old family inheritance, his uncle, George Allingham, having died peacefully on the previous morning.

Sad and strange it was for me to see my son take the title by which I first knew his dear father; and when he came into my room at Abbotsholme, and told me the news, though long expected, and always more or less looked forward to, my tears, the rare tears of old age, came as a flood. There was nothing to regret for George; he had long been ready to depart; his eyesight had failed; and if it had not been for the ceaseless care and attention of Agnes Willoughby, his declining years would have been sad indeed. As it was, they were brightened by her presence; and she led him gently to the Cross of Christ, where, in child-like faith and confidence, he waited for the call to the heavenly inheritance.

In the midst of this personal and, to me, momentous change, I did not forget the Queen. I read with eager interest the stories of the first days of her accession which were circulated. All told the same beautiful tale of sweet reasonableness, womanly tenderness, and queenly dignity.

There was never a more touching incident in the history of any sovereign than that of the young Queen, in the first moment of agitation at the news the Archbishop communicated to her, acknowledging her dependence on God by the simple words addressed to

the Archbishop, "I ask your prayers on my behalf." Then Primate and Princess knelt down together, and surely the help that was needed and asked for was granted.

So tender was her sympathy with her aunt, the Queen Adelaide, that she addressed the letter to her acknowledging the news of the King's death, "To the Queen of England."

A lady-in-waiting said, when she read the inscription: "Your Majesty, you are now Queen of England;" and the quiet reply speaks volumes:

"Do you think I would remind the widow of this fact?"

When the proclamation of the young Queen took place, and she came to a window in St. James's Palace, the air was rent with acclamations from the people. Then the sensitive young heart was deeply moved, and turning to her mother, the Duchess of Kent, she threw her arms round her, and wept out the mingled emotions which thronged in her heart upon her mother's breast.

"Just what I should have done," Stella said; "for where could I find a safer place to pour out either joy or sorrow?"

I had to trust to my son-in-law and Stella to go to Allingham as my representatives when Stephen returned to the funeral. I was glad to be spared any undue emotion or excitement, and it was not till the autumn that I went to the old home and was received there by my son Stephen, Lord Allingham.

Everything was left as George had promised it

should be left, in admirable order; and never did a young man enter upon the duties of a new sphere under more auspicious circumstances than my son. He very much wished me to come and take the head of his household; but I was too old, and shrank from the responsibility. Then it was arranged that I should go on living at the Croft, and that dear Agnes Wiloughby should live with me and Mary Broughton, and that Stella should live with her brother at Allingham Park.

Stephen wished to move for letters patent which would grant to me the title of Lady Allingham, and give his sisters that of Honourable.

"There ought to be a Lady Allingham, dear mother," Stephen said.

But I, smiling, told him she must be young and fair; and that I, nearly touching my seventh decade, wished for no other name than that which his father had given me. Was it not enough to be his widow, and bear his style and title?

"But he *would* have been Lord Allingham," Stephen pleaded, "and he *would* have been well pleased to know you were Lady Allingham."

"I do not think he *would* have cared," I said, "about so empty a distinction. No, Stephen; I would rather rest in the honour of being his wife—the wife of a true man, who has passed into the skies!"

Stephen had gone through the University with distinction. He had a decided taste for art and literature, and Allingham Park became, with Stella for its mistress, a very different place from old times.

Stella joined heartily with her brother in all schemes for the good of the tenants and the people about the place. Since her great sorrow, my Stella's spiritual life had wonderfully deepened; and all the old impatience with what she might think too narrow a groove, and too many words about the inner and hidden life of the soul, was gone.

Stella was touchingly kind and considerate to dear Mary Broughton, and found the way to her heart by consulting her about books for her lending library at the Park, and other little matters connected with her new position.

Stephen also made a brave stand on the right side, and I could almost see his father living again in him. Surely I may sing with a thankful heart my Nunc Dimitiss.

We had a large family gathering for the coronation of our Queen, which took place on the 28th of June, the year after the accession.

There was a general feeling of sympathy and admiration for our young sovereign. Every incident connected with her was eagerly listened to. Everyone felt that there was something which appealed to their deepest sensibilities in this fair maiden of nineteen receiving the crown of this great Empire. It was, I may safely say, not mere idle curiosity or delight in a pageant which gathered together the great mass of people at Westminster that day. Hearts which had before been seldom touched or quickened by any unusual emotion were throbbing then with a feeling they scarcely understood.

The fatigue of that long waiting in the Abbey

In Four Reigns.

would have been too much for me, but I heard the fullest account of the scene from Stella. She was present with her brother, and they were well placed for seeing and hearing. The scene was indeed one never to be forgotten, and I need not describe it here in any minute particulars. Stella said the supreme moment was reached when the crown was placed on that young brow by the Archbishop's hand. But nothing touched her so much as the act of sweet and graceful kindness which seemed to show the true woman in our young Queen.

One of the peers who came to do homage was very old, and as he ascended the steps of the throne, he stumbled and fell. The Queen's first impulse seemed to be to rise, and when the poor old man came feebly forward to do homage, she was seen to come down two or three steps to meet him, and so put him at ease.

It is these touches of kindly sympathy and tenderness of heart which make the Queen so dear to her people. When all the pomp and ceremony of that Coronation Day shall have faded and been forgotten, when the young voices of the Westminster boys as they shouted "Vivat Victoria Regina!" shall have long ceased to echo, and the boys themselves who raised that great chant of acclamation shall be grey-haired men, this act of considerate and kindly thoughtfulness for the old peer will be remembered, and be as a magnet to draw the heart of the people to their Sovereign lady, Queen Victoria.

It will be followed, I cannot doubt, by many and many another deed of womanly sympathy, and stand

first on the list of countless expressions of a like kindness of heart, which will show to her people that "the touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

I cannot but think a new chapter is opening in the "History of England," if the promise of youth is fulfilled, in the beauty of a character, in which to all the dignity and queenliness of the Queen is added the sweetness and womanliness of the true woman.

In the autumn of 1839 my son-in-law, Cecil Barrington, was promoted to a Canonry in Milchester Cathedral. It was a great pleasure to me to see his worth and his really great gifts thus recognised. He was still comparatively a young man, and this Canonry was acceptable to him in every way. Full of earnestness and zeal, he made quite a stir in the Cathedral of Milchester during his first three months' residence. It was so unusual for cathedral dignities to attempt to stir the calm waters of the cathedral chapter, and Cecil's energy and determination brought upon him, as was only natural, some remonstrance from his fellow-canons.

To keep three months' residence had been understood to mean attendance at daily service for the time, reading the first lesson, preaching once on Sundays, and giving dinners to such people as were thought worthy to be admitted within the select society of the Precincts.

Thus when Cecil and Benvenuta carried to Milchester the freedom and liberty of action which was habitual to them, and welcomed all sorts and conditions to their canonical house, they were looked upon with some suspicion. One very stiff lady of the old

canonical school called upon Benvenuta soon after her arrival, and said she had come to tell her who were the people in Milchester whom she must not visit in person, and merely return their calls as a matter of etiquette by leaving cards at the door.

Benvenuta only thanked her with a smile for her kind intentions, but said her mother had always taught her as much as possible to value people for what they really were, rather than for their social position and rank.

This was a new doctrine indeed for Milchester in general, and the lady in particular, who shook her head, and said she only hoped Benvenuta might not have some unpleasant experiences.

I paid one visit to Milchester, and greatly delighted in the quaint old town, the noble cathedral, and the beautiful surroundings of hill and valley. But still more did I delight in hearing Cecil's sermons in the cathedral, all breathing forth the fervour of a soul who longed to kindle the like fervour in his hearers. The heart speaking to the heart always seems to me the real test of preaching. Something within us—that is to say if we are in earnest at all—responds to the man who is telling us of that which he *knows* and believes with his whole heart to be the Gospel of the grace of God.

The Canon's home at Milchester was a large rambling old place, with many nooks and corners, and an old-fashioned garden behind it, with stiff box borders, and a quaint stone fountain, which had long been disused, but which Cecil, to the delight of his children, had put in order.

I can never forget the day when the water first bubbled up, and we were all called to see the rise and fall of the crystal shower over the stone naiad, who had so long raised her reed with an upward glance in vain. It was a lovely picture as the six children all stood round the basin. The younger ones jumping for joy, and the elder girl, Marion, holding the hand of the most restless of the party, little Oliffe; while my dear Benvenuta held her eight-months-old baby in her arms, and I, the grandmother, looked on.

A memorable day it was. The home happiness seemed so unclouded, the sympathy between husband and wife so perfect, and I spared to see "my children's children and peace upon Israel!"

After a month's visit I returned home, bringing with me the child who was dearest to my heart, little Oliffe—his parents kindly consenting to lend him to me. With his name he seemed to have inherited his grandfather's nature, and he was strikingly like him in face and feature.

The boy was attached to me in a remarkable way. I do not think that I spoiled him, after the fashion of weak-hearted grandmothers; but there was in my little Oliffe the chivalrous feeling, that as grannie was old and weak, he must be good and quiet when she wished it.

We set off together one bright summer morning in my travelling carriage for our day's journey to Windsor, and it was not till Oliffe lost sight of his father and mother, who were standing at the gate of the Close to wave us a last good-bye, that Oliffe suddenly realized

he was leaving them. He struggled hard to repress his tears, but they would burst forth as he said, sobbing:

"I am *glad* to come to be grannie's little boy, but I am *sorry* to leave mother, and father, and all."

A mingled feeling of joy and grief which my little grandson experienced on his first journey, is the common experience of us all, on longer and more important journeys as we pass through life.

I found on my arrival at home that my little grandson's advent was a matter of surprise to my friends. Even Stella foretold that I should find him a great trouble, and a heavy responsibility; but the child-life made a sweet atmosphere about me, and certainly renewed my youthful vigour. I began again the little lessons in the small square books, and guided those chubby fingers to make pot-hooks and strokes. I taught my boy to repeat the dear familiar hymns my own children had loved, and Agnes Willoughby supplied all my deficiencies by walking with my child, and finding suitable companions for him in Windsor. "He is only on a visit," I would say to any inquirer; but in my heart I hoped that visit might last as long as I lived.

One day Stephen came to tell us that a great crowd had gone out on the Dover road to meet the young Prince, who was to arrive that day, and who, report said, was the chosen husband of the Queen. He urged me, as the day was fine and warm, to drive in an open barouche with him and Stella, and take little Oliffe and Agnes Willoughby with us. I hesitated a little, for although when I go on quietly I am fairly

well and able to enjoy the good things God has granted to my old age, still I dread excitement and bustle. But I shall ever be glad that I was one of those who, with my children and grandson, had that first passing glimpse of Prince Albert. His face, as I saw it then, made a deep impression on me. The expression, so grave, and yet so sweet, telling of a nature too deep to be easily moved by what might seem to many a very exalted position as the husband of the Queen of this realm. There was no exultation in his manner; it was rather the dignified bearing of one who recognised a great responsibility in the future which opened before him, and a determination to quit himself as a man and a Christian should.

It happened that as the carriage in which the Prince was travelling came near the point where ours was drawn up, there was a momentary pause, caused by a restive horse in the crowd. Stephen was standing uncovered, and Stella and I rose also. Oliffe, who was held in the back seat by Agnes Willoughby, his sunny curls waving in the breeze, called out in his ringing childish voice:

“How do you do, Prince?”

Then what a smile beamed upon my little lad as the carriage moved on, and Prince Albert turned several times to look back at the boy whose simple childish welcome had evidently pleased him, and not been taken as an undue liberty.

The wedding of the Queen was celebrated in St. James's Chapel Royal on the 10th of February, 1840. A wedding indeed of heart and hand, and

the enthusiasm of the people was raised to its highest pitch.

Looking back at the crowned Queens of England, there was not one a happy bride united in the first bloom and freshness of youth to the man she loved. The Queen of a few sad days was widowed even before her own fair head was laid on the block. Mary was the miserable unloved bride of an unwilling bridegroom. Elizabeth lived and died without knowing the blessedness which the true union of hearts can give. Mary had seen her dreams fade as the wife of the reserved and silent William of Orange before the crown encircled her brow. Anne, who was married to George of Denmark before her accession, never gives the impression of a happy, trusted and trusting wife, and her husband was not one to show respect or admiration. It was left, therefore, for Queen Victoria to stand at the altar, the royal bride who for the first time united in her own person all that can make life beautiful, and thus to realize the blessedness of a love which would lighten every burden of state for her henceforth.

There are many descriptions of that scene in the Chapel Royal, and those who saw it, and heard the Queen's musical and clear voice pronounce the vows of allegiance to her husband, can scarce speak of it without tears.

Our young Queen has many royal gifts, but perhaps there is none more striking than her clear, ringing voice, which, though clear and penetrating, is singularly musical.

"The concentration of music!" Stephen said, when he described the scene to me.

Stella brought me some verses, written by a young lady who is rapidly taking a high place in the rank of poets—Elizabeth Barrett. I was much touched by these verses as Stella read them, and I will write them here.

"She vows to love, who vowed to rule, the chosen at her side.
Let none say 'God preserve the Queen!' but rather 'Bless the bride!'

None blow the trump, none bend the knee, none violate the dream,
Wherein no monarch, but a wife, she to herself may seem.
Or if ye say 'Preserve the Queen!' oh, breathe it inward low,
She is a *woman*, and beloved, and 'tis enough but so.

"Count it enough, thou noble Prince, who tak'st her by the hand,
And claimest for thy lady-love, our Lady of the land!
Esteem that wedded hand less dear for sceptre than for ring,
And hold her uncrowned womanhood to be the noble thing.
Long live she! send up loyal shouts, and true hearts pray between,
The blessings happy peasants have, be thine, O crowned Queen!"

1842. Hitherto I have written my history in the past, but to-day I take up the present. It is May-time, and the whole world wears its festive garments. Our Queen's birthday! and there have been royal salutes, and glad voices, and a general sense of rejoicing ever since daybreak!

Our Queen is now a proud mother of two darling children. I have seen them both to-day, on the terrace of Windsor Castle. I had Oliffe with me; and leaning on my son's arm I stood once more, as in

days long past, to catch a sight of royalty. No longer the eager expectant child who, pushed back in the crowd, could scarcely have her longed-for glimpse of King, Queen, and Princesses; and who had to confess to a feeling of disappointment that these royal personages were but like other men and women, after all. No longer a child, but an old woman, over whose head seventy-two summers and winters have come and gone; who rejoices that she has been spared to see the fair picture of domestic love which warmed her old heart this morning.

We had an excellent view of the Queen and Prince, and the royal children. To me, who had seen that glad young mother as a baby in her father's arms at Sidmouth, the scene was peculiarly touching. Personal recollections of those who were with me then overcame me, and my tears fell fast.

"Grannie is crying—poor grannie!" my little Oliffe said; and he touched Stephen's arm, and whispered: "Had we not better go home, uncle Stephen?"

So we turned away; and this evening, when I paid my nightly visit to Oliffe, he, holding my hand fast, said:

"Why are you sad on the Queen's birthday, grannie?"

Then I told the boy how I could not help thinking of the past days of his dear grandfather—that brave soldier and servant of Christ, who was to me what the noble young Prince was to our Queen. I told him, too, of his uncle St. John, and how he had been with me when I saw the Queen as a baby—very like the lovely little Princess who had smiled and waved her hand so graciously that day.

That pair of children—the Prince but six months old—were indeed fair to look upon. The Princess Royal so strikingly resembles her gracious mother in her infant days. The Prince of Wales is a noble boy, with the fair Saxon hair and blue eyes which are the inheritance of his kingly race.

Oliffe detained me till the light had almost faded from the west, and his last words were murmured in sleepy tones, but they came to me almost as a message:

"Never mind, grannie darling—never mind! Don't cry any more. You'll soon see grandfather again now, and uncle St. John."

Then with a sudden effort to rouse himself, he said:

"And you'll tell grandfather Oliffe tries to be a good boy—like—him."

Before I had closed the door Oliffe was asleep.

I went back to the old sitting-room where I had passed so many, many hours—as a maiden, a wife, and a mother, and now as a widow. But truly God has been good to me, and I may well say, "My song shall be of mercy and judgment."

From the window I could see the great pile of the Castle rising in sharpness of outline against the sky of the summer night. I thought of the happy wife and mother there, and I prayed that our gracious Queen might long rejoice in her children, and long know the blessedness of the wife who can lean with the confidence of a loving heart upon the husband who is indeed her staff and support in her journey through this mutable and perilous life.

My little grandson's words have a prophetic mean-

ing for me. I do not think it *will* be long now before I see my beloved ones again.

I always think that my husband will be there to lead me within the gates into the city where—may I not reverently believe?—I shall see the King in His beauty, in the land which is very far off. And again I fall back on my little Oliffe's words, "*It will not be long now.*"

A YEAR LATER.

It was not long for her! Little Oliffe's words were as a prophecy soon to be fulfilled. Althea Allingham, my dear and honoured mother, entered into rest on her seventy-third birthday, November 1, 1842—that day which is always marked by our thoughts going forth with peculiar tenderness to the saints of God who are gone before.

My mother was spared all pain of parting. The journey through the dark valley was so short, and so smoothed by the Hand of Infinite Love, that we had scarce time to realize that the Master had come and called for her, ere her pure spirit fled.

It is not for me to add anything to this story of her life. But the half has not been told of her rare intellectual gifts, her ready sympathy, her tender love; for her deeds of charity and goodness are written in the hearts of many who are left to mourn their loss, but rejoice in her gain.

Her children rise up and call her blessed. And surely I could find no better words to embody what is the utterance of my own heart, and that of my brother Stephen, who said:

"Patience with the erring, and sadness for sin, not anger against the sinner, characterized our mother; and many were won by her pitying love who would have been lost but for its influence."

I am come to the old Croft, for Stephen, to our great joy, has at last married, and has taken a fair young mistress to Allingham Park. Thus it falls out that I come to my mother's place, and live here where she lived, and loved, and suffered, with two of her most faithful friends—Mrs. Broughton, still active and vigorous, and dear Agnes Willoughby.

We shall try to carry on my mother's work in Windsor as far as in us lies; and I have prevailed on Benvenuta to give me a right in Oliffe, who seemed like a legacy left to me by his dear grandmother. He brings the sunshine of his merry childhood into the Croft, and is the light of my eyes.

For the rest, what can I say more? May He who has knit His saints together in one communion and fellowship help me to follow my beloved one in all virtuous and godly living, so that by His mercy I may come to those unspeakable joys where the King of kings reigneth in His beauty, and this mortal puts on a glorious immortality.

STELLA ALLINGHAM.

THE CROFT, WINDSOR,
All Saints' Day, 1843.

THE END.



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